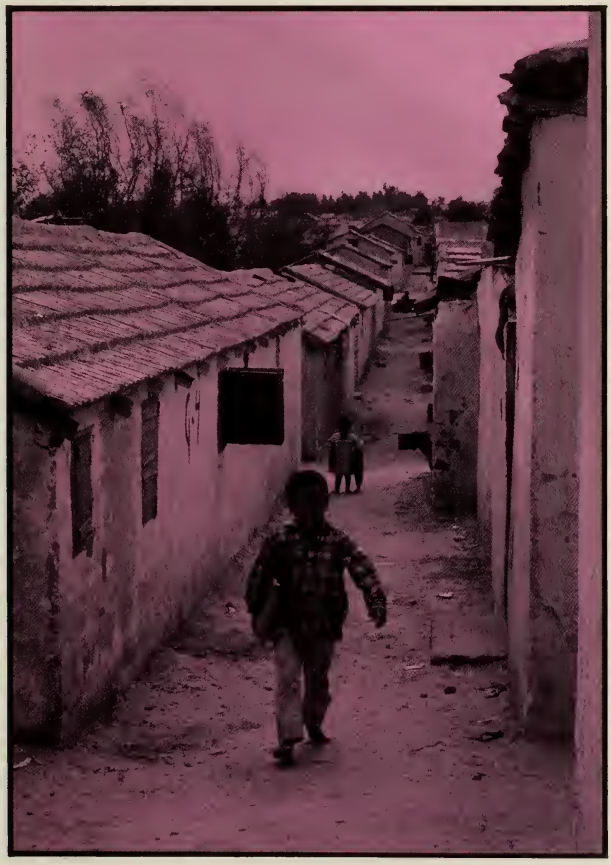
Paul Cossali & Clive Robson

STATELESS IN GAZA



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Stateless in Gaza

This book is dedicated to our parents.

Stateless in Gaza

Paul Cossali and Clive Robson

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Contents

Chapter One

Dispossession

1

Chapter Two

Society

25

Chapter Three

Occupation

61

Chapter Four

Resistance

101

LEBANON
Tyre
Quneitra
ARAB PALESTINE
Safad
SYRIA
Acre
Haifa
Tiberias
Nazareth
Afula
Irbid
Beisan
MEDITERRANEAN SEA
Jenin
Ajlun
Tulkarm
Nablus
Salt
Zarqa
Jaffa
Lydda
Ramallah
Amman
Ramle
Bira
Jericho
Jerusalem
Bethlehem
DEAD SEA
Gaza
Hebron
Khan Yunis
Rafah
EGYPT
LOCATION OF REFUGEE CAMPS
Town
Camp
Jabalia
GAZA
Beach
Nuseirat
Bureij
Maghazi
Deir el-Balah
KHAN YOUNIS
Khan Younis
RAFAH
Rafah

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CHAPTER ONE
DISPOSSESSION

"For the refugees who had lost all their possessions, there was nothing else but to learn."

Abdel Salam was the first person in our village to build a house out of stone — he had lots of money and contacts with the foreigners. Before that, all the houses were made of clay, but lots of people started to copy Abdel Salam — rebuilding as God made things easier for us. Mohammed Falor who passed away, God rest his soul, built a house with a stone roof. His house was famous. Lots of people came to see it. My house was built of mud, but I built a room of stone alongside. I had three rooms — part of the house was for the livestock and part for the family. Men used to sit with the cattle, even among their droppings, we didn't care. That's how life was then. We stored the cattle fodder in our half of the house. I used to put my cloak on the fodder and sleep on top of it.

We used to grow all kinds of vegetables and things — corn for making bread, barley, maize, lentils, tomatoes, ochra, different kinds of melons, courgettes and cucumbers. We also had orchards of walnuts, figs and grapes. But we didn't use modern methods and lots of land was wasted. Abdel Hamid had sixty dunums[1] which he hardly used. Ours was a rich village with about fourteen thousand dunums and twelve thousand inhabitants. There was always work to be done — rowing up the maize, picking the fruit, planting the cucumbers — you know — the wheat before the lentils, and then the figs and grapes. The cucumbers and the tomatoes came in the summer and so life carried on. We didn't have enough to sell but we always had enough for the village. Some of the landless labourers would work a piece of land and take half the crop — two dunums of tomatoes perhaps. Some used to fish and some

used to go off to Jaffa, Ramla, Wadi Hunein or Beit Dajan with shovels and axes over their shoulders — carrying bags of salt, flour and sesame paste to make their own food. They would work in the orange groves over there — sleeping in the orchards — for a month perhaps — or two. They earned twelve piastres a day — enough to buy twelve pounds of corn. But by and large, as we took care of the land, it took care of us, with God's help.

Each village was ruled by a Mukhtar — each family had a Mukhtar, and they were the law. That's how it was. They solved disputes, like when Abu Maher's cattle trespassed on my land and grazed the lentils. I was furious. Haj Hassan, he was the Mukhtar, summoned Abu Maher and we came to an agreement. He gave me some of his figs. It was settled.

If we fell ill, Abdullah El Agra would come to us. He would tie a thread round the head, arm or leg and that was that. There weren't any doctors. I once hurt my eye and I bought some drops from Jaffa.

There was no school in the village so we started to build one. It had no windows, doors or ceilings though. That was in 1947. Before that, some people went to school in Asdud. I went for a while but stopped. Sheikh Ali and Rasheed used to teach the Quran. They'd put us under a sycamore tree and make us memorise verses from the Quran. We didn't have pens and books though. We used to write on bits of wood and metal with reeds which were sharpened and dipped in ink. The teacher would make us write a verse, rub it out and then write another. He was so strict that we didn't dare ask to go for a piss — so we just did it in our trousers. By the end of the lesson there was quite a pool! If we wanted to know what was in the news, we would get Attiyeh Hassanein to read to us from *The Defence.* We didn't understand much of it — all those names. We knew about the war in Europe though. The Mukhtar had a radio — a present from the British. He used to put his radio in the window and we'd gather round to listen sometimes. In the evenings we would go with our friend to one of those round brick sheds — every notable had one — and sit on a bench we'd built. We'd swop stories and talk about the crops. One of those who could read might take up a copy of *The Wanderings of the Beni Hillel Tribe* and read to us about a journey they had made. The labourers used to play cards, but we would play *Siniye* or *Tab* and the winner would get two or three kilos of dried figs. Sometimes we

used to play a team with hooked sticks and a stone as a ball — you won't have seen this because we don't play it anymore. We used to go off catching birds from time to time, bringing back thirty or more.

We used to get on pretty well with the nearby villages — El Batani, Asdud, Bet Daras, Basheet — you know the names. Some better than others though. The notables used to visit each other at weddings and funerals and maybe take a couple of sheep. They were always in touch with each other and we would know of a wedding or a funeral within a day. The poor people, those who sold figs and sycamore berries, didn't mix much though. No chance to really.

In the passage above, Abu Tawfiq has vividly described life in his village north of Gaza in the days before he was driven south in 1948. He is 74 now, and lives in Bureij camp. Prior to the establishment of the Israeli state, the Gaza Strip didn't exist as a separate entity. During the period of the British Mandate, Palestine was divided into three separate districts. Gaza and the towns and villages of the coastal plain as far as Lydda in the north and Rafah in the south were part of the Southern District. The economy of the Southern District was primarily agrarian and the population largely rural. Some of the felaheen, like Abu Tawfiq, were small landholders but most were tenants on land belonging to feudal landlords. Gaza, although the largest town of the district, supported only a few cottage industries; weaving, pottery and soap manufacture. Its importance came from its position on the traditional caravan route, and later rail link, between Asia and Africa across the Sinai. It was also the market town for the surrounding villages and, until the early thirties, local landowners used its port facilities to export barley and wheat to Europe.

In 1922 the British were given Mandatory power over Palestine by the League of Nations with a provision to put into effect the Balfour Declaration of 1917, in which the British had pledged their support for the Zionist movement and their aim of establishing a Jewish national home in Palestine.

From the beginning of their rule in Palestine, British support for Zionism led to discrimination in favour of the small but growing number of Jewish settlers and against the far larger Arab population. The highly motivated settler movement was allowed to develop its independence in every field. Education in the Jewish sector was left entirely in the hands

of the Jews and no restrictions were placed on the establishment of Jewish-owned industries.

Similarly agricultural policy was dedicated to keeping the price of products low so as to reduce the value of land and thereby facilitate the selling of land to Zionist groups. The imposition of heavy land taxes also encouraged Arab landowners to get rid of non-productive land.

Life for Palestinian Arabs on the other hand was frozen for the thirty years of British rule. Although there was some expansion in the port cities of Haifa and Jaffa, attempts by Arabs to establish or upgrade local industries were smothered by a complex bureaucracy and red tape. Services too were maintained at the barest minimum. There were only four government clinics and fifty-five hospital beds in the entire Southern District, and no ambulances until one was finally provided in the last years of the Mandate. As Mustafa, a retired teacher, recalls, education was also very limited;

In the Gaza area and the Southern District as a whole, I can say that the whole question of education was ignored by the government. In the villages they had what we called combined schools. These were usually single rooms where all the classes would be taught simultaneously by one teacher. I began my career as a teacher in one of these village schools in 1936. The school itself was a mud-brick building with two holes in the wall for windows and no furniture except for the teacher's chair and a small blackboard. Like all the village schools at that time it only provided for four years of elementary schooling. Each of my classes sat in a corner of the room. I used to teach the first class for ten minutes, give them some work to do, and then move on to the next and so on. I was one of the few teachers who had actually had some formal training — most of the teachers were not trained. And it wasn't the government who provided the salaries for all the village teachers, usually it was the villagers themselves who were expected to collect food and money among themselves to pay for the teacher.

Even in the bigger villages and towns like Khan Yunis and Ber Saba there were only elementary schools — Gaza was the only town in the area which had a government secondary school. In fact Rashadye, that was the name of the school, wasn't really a full secondary school, because there was no final year. Students who did well in the second

secondary class had to go to the Arab College in Jerusalem if they wanted to matriculate, although some of the richer families sent their sons to Jerusalem for all their education. There was also a small private school in Gaza called Watanya which was run by the local Wafq organisation. I think it had about 30 students and Rashadye had about 60, so you can see that the number of people in the Gaza area who had a secondary school education was very small. Education wasn't compulsory and of course many children didn't go to school at all — maybe only 15 per cent attended.

The school curriculum for the secondary schools was designed by the British, but there were no British school inspectors except for English which everyone studied after the 4th elementary. Our syllabus in the secondary school was incredibly difficult. We had to study all about the history and geography of Britain. Our history book was massive, you had to have big muscles just to carry it. It was about 2000 pages long and we had to memorise it by heart to pass the examination. It was hardly surprising that only about 10% of the secondary students managed to pass. I couldn't believe it when I heard that I hadn't failed, I thought they must have made a mistake with the marking or got me mixed up with someone else. One classmate of mine was so delighted when he heard that he had passed that his parents slaughtered a camel to celebrate. Apart from the very rich and the very bright who could go to the American University of Beirut or King Faisal University in Cairo, the only option for those of us who were successful in school was to go to the Arab College in Jerusalem and train to be a teacher. That was the highest qualification you could then get in Palestine. Teachers were considered the intelligentsia among Palestinian Arabs, and as such they were perceived as a threat by the Mandate authorities. The way they dealt with this threat was to separate the teachers from the places where they had grown up, the places where it would be easiest for them to influence people.

The British only wanted 'yes men' in positions of influence. I myself was sent, I think exiled is a better word, to teach in a small village way up in the north near Safad. Really it was a difficult place for a donkey to live. When I protested to the authorities about my placement there, I was told by an official that 'any mule can tread that mill'. What he meant was that I was dispensable and powerless, and that if I didn't

agree to go there they wouldn't lose any sleep over sacking me.

The Balfour Declaration aroused a general movement against Zionism amongst Palestinians, but their opposition tended to be spontaneous and disorganised. Political leadership in Palestine was dominated by the leaders of traditional families whose ideology was based upon a narrow concept of self-interest. Fearing the consequences of a politically aware peasantry and working class, they made little attempt to define the issues and clarify the important question of who was the main adversary, the Jews or the British. Until the early thirties Arabs were primarily orientated towards confrontation with the Jews.

During the riots of 1929 against increased Jewish immigration, the slogan had been "fight the Jews" — in Gaza three indigenous Jewish families were expelled from the town — but by the time of similar demonstrations in Jaffa four years later the cry had changed to "fight the British". This shift in consciousness was largely due to the work of small groups of intellectuals who founded the Independence Party. The activists of the Independence Party shared the view that Zionist settlement was an offshoot of British colonial policy.

Palestinian opposition to British policy centred primarily on the cities of Jaffa, Jerusalem and Nablus. In Gaza where the leadership was very firmly in the hands of the big landowning families political activity was on a much smaller scale. Disturbances in Gaza were usually a result of Gazans responding to events in other parts of Palestine.

The riots and demonstrations grew in intensity throughout the thirties and culminated in a Palestinian general strike and armed revolt against the British. Military resistance was based in the central mountains around Nablus and Ramallah, but there was also fighting in the Southern District. Palestinian *fedayeen* attacked bridges and oil installations around Gaza and successfully dynamited the Cairo-Jaffa railway line. The British responded to the latter action by making it a policy to attach a carriage containing Palestinian detainees to the front of their trains.

The revolt ended in 1939 when its leadership accepted the mediation efforts of the Arab regimes. For the *fellaheen* who had made up the bulk of the fighters there was a sense of betrayal. For many it was only confirmation that in the fight against the British their own interests didn't coincide with the interests of their bourgeois leadership. Doubt was also sown about the viability of a pan-Arab struggle against colonialism given

the Arab governments' apparent willingness to appease the British. The result was both a radicalisation of the peasantry and the strengthening of a specific Palestinian nationalist feeling.

The onset of World War Two and the issuing of a White Paper in 1939 limiting the immigration of Jews and promising Palestinian independence after ten years provoked predictably different responses from the two communities. Palestinian political activity was put on ice, whereas for the Zionist it was the cue to start sharpening their knives.

The war brought some benefits for the Palestinian population. There were increased employment opportunities and an improvement in the educational system as the British demanded better educated personnel to ensure that the Empire kept running smoothly. The Zionist movement however was able to use the war to advance its preparedness for the eventual takeover of Palestine. They volunteered to serve in the British army as a Jewish unit which after the war became the nucleus of the Zionists' underground army and its terrorist partners.

Abu Tawfiq again:

Things went all wrong when the Jews came. The British favoured the Jews over us and this turned all the villagers against them. The British promised us guns and they brought maybe three or four. But then they took a car load to the Jewish settlement beside us. They made themselves out to be referees, like in a football match, but they were terrible mediators — they were against us — I know.

To start with we got on well with the Jews. They used to pay us courtesy visits. Their Mukhtar — Cohen was his name — came to my uncle's funeral and he brought three kilos of coffee. He wore a cloak and a headscarf — like us. They built good relations with the notables but we were so ignorant and gullible, we didn't know what was really happening. If there was a problem — like Abu Maher letting his sheep graze their meadows, they would come over and have a word with the Mukhtar. He would summon Abu Maher and tell him off. Once they shot one of Abu Maher's cows which was grazing their meadow, there was terrible trouble and we brought the Judge to solve it. We slaughtered a bull and invited them to eat *Fetta* and patched things up. The Jews got together with our notables and won them over. We didn't realise it was just to protect themselves. We thought it was a genuine friendship but we were deceived. Once I saw them training their kids

— all lined up practising on the wasteland. We never thought it was military training or that it would be used against us. You would have known what they were up to but we just weren't educated. Our relationship with them was based on fear I think — not mutual respect like it should have been. Only El Mughabi built a real friendship with them. When things got bad, some villagers tried to shoot him because they thought he was a spy.

Towards the end of the war, Zionist militants began a campaign of terror designed to pressurise the British into abandoning their restrictions on Jewish immigration and into allowing a Jewish state to come into existence. Rather than taking responsibility for the explosive situation its policies had created, the British passed on the problem of Palestine to the United Nations. In 1947 the member states voted to partition Palestine into an Arab and a Jewish state.

The partition resolution was opposed by the Arabs but welcomed by the Jews who, although constituting less than a third of the population and owning only six per-cent of the land, found themselves in control of sixty per-cent of Palestine. Zionist delight was tempered by the realisation that Palestinian Muslims and Christians actually outnumbered Jews in the proposed Jewish state. For the Zionists who'd always envisaged a Jewish state to be exactly that, the demographic balance was unacceptable, as apparently was the size of their proposed state. Before the Mandate ended in May 1948 the Zionist militants had seized large areas allocated to the Arab state and using a combination of psychological terror and forcible expulsion had begun to systematically 'cleanse' the area under their control of its non-Jewish inhabitants.

Fayez, originally from Jaffa:

There were several terrible attacks on Jaffa in April 1948. In the first one, some Zionists rolled a barrel of TNT into the town centre which crashed through the crowded Al Hamra cinema. As the survivors rushed out, they were mown down with Bren guns by Zionists waiting in two cars. In the second attack, a huge bomb was put in the vegetable market and dozens of shoppers were killed. I remember another bomb was put in a communal house for the poor near the clock tower. We resisted these attacks as best we could. Once three Zionists were killed as they

were planning an attack. We had a small iron factory where we tried to make weapons, but they were much better equipped with modern weapons which they had got from abroad and from the British.

On 25th April, it all came to a head. They attacked from the north and east with heavy cannons and machine guns. Everyone left their homes and fled to the old city on the sea shore. Some desperately tried to put their families and possessions into the small fishing boats, but the sea was stormy and they were thrown back onto the shore. Everyone was wailing and weeping and there was total chaos. My brother and I ran all over the town trying to find a truck but there weren't any. They were all either full of people or burnt out. There were many dead donkeys too, with their trailers still attached to them, lying in the road. Next we went to the sea but clearly there was no chance of escape there. In the end we found a truck and our family with three others all climbed on. We had one suitcase with us: everything else was left at home. As we passed along the road south, we saw three British tanks pointing south. They were in it together with the Zionists. The British led us through the settlement south east of Jaffa along the back roads. When we got to Sbeel Abu Nabout we were attacked by a group of Zionists. The girl who was sitting on my knee was shot in the legs. I was hit in the arm, but the bullet hit the button on my sleeve and I wasn't injured. It took us seven hours to get to Majdal where we slept the night. Early next morning we travelled on to Gaza. There we were: us and a suitcase.

The poorly armed Palestinians were unable to mount an effective defence of the Arab areas. Many of the towns and villages south of Jaffa were easily overrun causing thousands of refugees to head for the comparative safety of Gaza.

When the Mandate officially ended the state of Israel was declared. The Arab governments sent token forces, amounting to some twenty thousand men, to aid the Palestinians. Despite some early successes their poorly led and ill-equipped troops were no match for the new Israeli army. By the end of the fighting only twenty per-cent of Palestine remained in Arab hands; the high ground west of the river Jordan and a small strip on the south coast around the city of Gaza which the Egyptian army had managed to hold on to.

Nearly a million Palestinian Arabs were uprooted by what came to be

known as the catastrophe of 1948. The population of what had become the Gaza Strip trebled from eighty thousand to nearly two hundred and forty thousand creating the massive problem of where and how to accommodate the new refugees, a problem exacerbated by the onset of the winter rains. All the public buildings, schools and mosques were given over to providing shelter, but many of the refugees had to make do with makeshift tents or caves hollowed out of sand cliffs. Others were taken in for weeks and sometimes months at a time by Gaza families. Initial relief work was carried out by the Quakers in conjunction with Palestinian and Egyptian volunteers. Medical needs were seen to, rations handed out and large tent cities were set up to overcome the shortage of shelter. These soon evolved into Gaza's eight refugee camps. Abu Tawfiq:

The whole village walked south — some people had donkeys to help carry their possessions — a few had trucks. I carried my niece in one arm and a pile of blankets in the other. We didn't bring much because we thought we would soon be going back. Only Al Mughabi stayed behind — even his wife and children came with us. I never heard what happened to him. We decided to head for Khan Yunis where my father had a friend that he used to sell cloth to. We stayed there for a while then we moved to an old British army barracks. The next day I walked to El Bureij and it was only then that it really hit me: thousands of refugees with no shelter, no food, nothing. Everyone was wandering around looking bewildered and lost. I felt empty and heartbroken. We had no work and no food — and to think that the maize crop which had looked like being a good one, would now be ready for picking in the village! I don't know how we got by. We were so hungry we even took beams and bricks from the barracks to sell. People brought us rations — peas and powdered milk. We mixed them with flour to try and make bread, but it just wasn't the same. We got rations every 15 days, but it was always a struggle after the first week. Somehow we managed though and this gave us strength and warmth. It was a time to forget old scores and pull together.

For the first years after 1948, with everyone preoccupied in finding shelter and scratching a living, pulling through became the first priority. Many of the Palestinians, like Hamdi, who'd been active in the struggles

before 1948, channelled their energies into establishing basic services. At first he worked as a volunteer and after 1950, as a teacher with the United Nations Relief Works Agency (UNRWA).

In all the areas where there were refugees, they began recruiting teachers for a rudimentary teaching programme. They only took people who had a secondary school education — I think there were about 80 such people in the whole Strip at that time — so I began working in 1949 as a volunteer teacher. We were all volunteers then and we used to get paid two sacks of flour per month. The teaching programme was supervised by the Egyptians in conjunction with the Quakers and we kept to the old British syllabus, because that was what all the children from the villages were used to. But it was never the syllabus that was the problem — by far the biggest difficulty was finding somewhere to teach. Usually we'd use the government schools — I mean the government would use them in the mornings and we would use them in the afternoons, and if there wasn't enough room for all the children, we'd put up tents next to the school. When I think back over this period, the thing that sticks clearest in my mind is just how enthusiastic we all were — teachers and pupils. I suppose for the refugees who had lost all their possessions, there was nothing else but to learn. But I also think that there was a very strong sense that we were taking things into our own hands and building our own future. Believe me, I am not the only one who thinks that things were better then with the sacks of flour than they are now with all the UNRWA dollars. Even with almost non-existent facilities, hardly any schools had chairs, blackboards or text books, we always managed to make the most of things. In the middle camps, they got round the problem of the blackboard by taking the pupils down to the beach to write in the sand with their fingers or by using chalk on the one tarmacked road. By the time UNRWA was established in 1950, we had 21 centres for teaching refugees, mostly in government schools, but also in other places such as the army barracks in the middle camps which the British had left behind. I think that only eight of the teachers at the beginning of 1949 were actually graduates of teacher training colleges, but in the summer of 1949, teacher training courses were set up in Gaza and Khan Yunis and all teachers had to attend for at least one month.

In Gaza, as in other places where Palestinian refugees had established camps, UNRWA was given a mandate to bring basic services to the population — health, education, housing and water.

Akram from Rafah camp:

When we first came to Rafah in 1948, my father rented two rooms in the town for us all to live in. Then UNRWA began to build the camp in Rafah so we registered our name and were given a house. All the houses were the same — 8 rows in each block — each row, 20 houses. Ours had a roof like a fisherman's net; in the winter we used to catch the rain in our pans. We had paraffin lamps for lighting and heating and a standpipe in each row for water, which was switched on twice a day. My sister and I used to get up early to get a good place in the queue to be sure we got some water. After three years, we moved to another house in the camp. It was the same size as the first one, but there was some space at the back, so my father built two lean-to's as extra rooms. An UNRWA official came saying my father would have to pay a fine for encroaching on UNRWA land, but when he saw the conditions we were living in, he didn't have the heart to take any money off us.

Although everyone regarded UNRWA as a necessity when it was established, there are people in Gaza who believe that it helped to create a dependence which contributed towards restricting the development of political consciousness. Hamdi again:

Everyone was always waiting for things, handouts, forms, cast-off clothes, applications and so on. The whole sense of rootlessness created a sort of paralysis. The world saw our cause as a refugee one instead of a political one.

Akram again:

Our first pleasure was the ration centre. We all had our ration cards and we used to queue up to collect our wheat, rice, lentils, butter, sugar and so on. UNRWA used to ask America and Europe to help the refugees and sometimes they would give us their old clothes. I used to love sifting through that pile of clothes. Once I found a man's jacket

which was much too large for me, but I turned up the sleeves and wore it every day. I was thrilled with it.

There were also the feeding centres. These were different to the ration centres. A health officer called Abu Yusef used to come to the schools and give special cards to the skinny kids to get extra meals from the feeding centres. When he came to my school, he pointed to the boy next to me who looked pretty ill. I got up with him and registered my name with the teacher when Abu Yusef wasn't looking. Fifteen days later, my card came and I dashed off to the centre to get a meal — an egg, an apple and half a loaf of bread. A week later, though, I lost my card. My father was furious.

Under King Farouk the Egyptians installed a military administration in Gaza with the minister of defence in Cairo responsible for the whole of the Strip. For the few years that Farouk was to remain on the throne, Egyptian-Palestinian relations were soured by Egyptian distrust. Farouk made it clear from the start that he wouldn't tolerate any political activity. The national committees which had been set up all over Palestine in 1948 were quickly disbanded in Gaza by the Egyptians and any weapons still held by Palestine were confiscated. The communists in particular were singled out for repression. Activists were jailed and the King's supporters in the Egyptian press orchestrated a smear campaign against the left in Gaza, accusing it of collaborating with the Zionists.

Farouk's overthrow by Nasser in the Revolution in 1952 was greeted with as much enthusiasm in Gaza as it was in Egypt. Nasser's early pronouncements, promising the beginning of a new era for the Arab world, were interpreted by Gazans as an indication of Nasser's willingness to take decisive action towards the recovery of Palestine. With this interpretation came the expectation that the Palestinians in Gaza would be allowed a far greater say in running their own affairs, but for the time being anyway, they were to be disappointed.

Nasser feared the consequences of provoking the Israelis as much as Farouk had. He understood that the situation in Gaza was potentially explosive; thousands of refugees crowded into a tiny area with nothing to occupy their minds except the memory of what they'd left behind and how they were going to return. Already some Palestinians were crossing the Armistice lines, usually to collect possessions from the villages which hadn't yet been destroyed by the Israelis, but sometimes also to raid Israeli

settlements bordering the Strip. As it was, Israeli reprisals for these incidents were becoming increasingly severe and in Nasser's mind they could easily provide the Israelis with the excuse to launch a full-scale war, which he knew Egypt was unprepared to fight. Nasser's way of defusing the situation, or so he thought, was to draw up a plan in 1954, in conjunction with the United States and UNRWA, to resettle the refugees in the Sinai. By any standards the conditions in the refugee camps were bad but the refugees vehemently opposed any move which either suggested their stay was permanent or that if they were to leave it would be anywhere but back to Palestine. For example when UNRWA had attempted to plant trees in Gaza's camps they were immediately uprooted by enraged residents who berated the Agency for wasting money on something which no one would be around long enough to see grow.

Gaza's response to the leaking of the plan was therefore quite predictable. For two days, thousands of demonstrators took to the streets, besieging Egyptian personnel in government buildings and burning vehicles and installations. The demonstrations were led by the newly formed and leftist-dominated Teachers' Union, but for Nasser the most serious repercussions of the demonstrations lay in the fact that they brought together such ideological foes as the communists and the Muslim Brotherhood as well as everyone in between. In the face of such unified opposition the resettlement plan was withdrawn. Hussein, a leading member of the Teachers' Union at the time, believes that the demonstrations were instrumental in bringing about a significant change in Nasser's policy towards Gaza.

The demonstrations disturbed Nasser, believe me. We depicted him as an American stooge because the Sinai scheme was an American plan. To us it was clear cut; the only move we would make was back to our homes. Nasser realised that he had to consult us, work with us instead of just pursuing his idea of what we wanted. He was an empiricist — he only believed in his own judgement, but he had the saving characteristic of being able to learn from his mistakes — to adapt, to develop. Only one thing never changed for him — his deep animosity towards imperialism and communism. It was a watershed for him I think. He had always had a special feeling towards the Palestinians — he fought with us in 1948 — but I think these demonstrations re-awakened a sympathy that had been dormant for a few years. His whole

policy towards Gaza changed. It became much more positive and dynamic.

During the resettlement demonstrations there was also a cry for arms. Through 1954 and 1955 Israeli punitive raids on Gaza were accounting for a growing number of Palestinian and Egyptian deaths. In a raid on Bureij camp in 1954 more than twenty Palestinian civilians lost their lives and in 1956 thirty nine, mostly sleeping Egyptian soldiers, were killed in an attack on an army barracks in the centre of Gaza town. Invariably Israeli punitive raids sparked off demonstrations amongst Palestinians and with each one the call for weapons became louder. After the largest raid Nasser addressed a rally in Gaza and announced that he had decided to buy arms from Czechoslovakia. Not long afterwards a small Palestinian battalion was created in Gaza, the first stage in the growth of armed Palestinian resistance.

Nasser's decision to purchase arms from the Eastern Bloc and his declared aim of regaining control of the Suez Canal gave Britain and France, along with their Israeli allies, the pretext to try and extinguish the rising star of Arab nationalism. For Israel there was the added incentive of the chance to expand its southern frontier.

The Israelis began their invasion by dropping an airborne force into the Sinai on the evening of the twenty-ninth of October 1956 and the next morning the Egyptian army's forward sector at Rafah was attacked leaving the defence of Gaza itself to a small Egyptian force and a number of Palestinian irregulars. Abu Ali remembers clearly the day of the invasion:

I was living in my father's house near the municipal park and early in the morning, I heard the droning of an Israeli plane flying overhead. I think everyone in Gaza recognised that sound. I jumped out of bed and scrambled underneath. After a few seconds, there was a terrific explosion — I felt things shattering in the house and I could smell gunpowder in the air. Everything had been wrecked, the furniture destroyed and the doors and windows blown in. The bomb itself hadn't hit our house — it hit our neighbour's. It killed the mother, the father, two boys and a girl. Only two girls survived. The plane had dropped a series of bombs from Suq Al Frason to our neighbour's house. I could never understand why they bombed where they did. It was a residential

area with no military targets. All the military bases were on the outskirts of the city. After the bombing, the Israelis stormed the city, shooting indiscriminately left and right as they came up Omar Al Mukhtar street. My brother and I were alone in the house, but when we heard the sound of the mortars and the machine guns, we dashed into the garden. We nearly got killed for the second time that day. We heard a rushing sound and a mortar landed on the ground beside us, but it didn't explode. We crawled on our stomachs for about 200 metres and sheltered behind a wall until the city had fallen.

The Israelis occupied the Gaza Strip and Sinai for four months before American pressure eventually forced them to evacuate both areas. There was plenty of evidence to suggest that the Israelis had every intention of staying in what Zionists believe is an integral part of Eretz Israel. Long-term contracts were signed with the people in the pottery industry only a few weeks before the Israelis withdrew and Israelis of Iraqi origin were brought to Gaza to supervise the restructuring of the educational system. All Egyptian personnel involved in services in Gaza were expelled from the Strip and just two weeks before they withdrew the Israelis were involved in machinations to form a new Municipal Council composed of dignitaries amenable to Israel. The occupation of 1956-57 was characterised by brutality and viciousness. By all accounts the Israeli army was completely lacking in discipline. Abu Ali again:

It was a real revelation to me to see how unorganised and in what poor shape the Israeli troops were. We even had a nick-name for them — 'The Hungry Ones' — because they were always stealing food and clothes, to keep themselves from starving and freezing. You know when they used to conduct searches of houses, it seemed it was more like a chance to loot and vandalise for them. So many people had their homes wrecked and their possessions stolen, myself included. They even took the used razor blades from my house.

There were times when the Israelis perpetrated what I can only describe as acts of mindless brutality. On one occasion some Israeli soldiers entered the house of a school teacher friend of mine and tried to rape his wife. He defended her and they killed him and her too. There was another person I knew, a fire-brigade official from Shujaiya called Harazin. One day when he was at his station, the army came by.

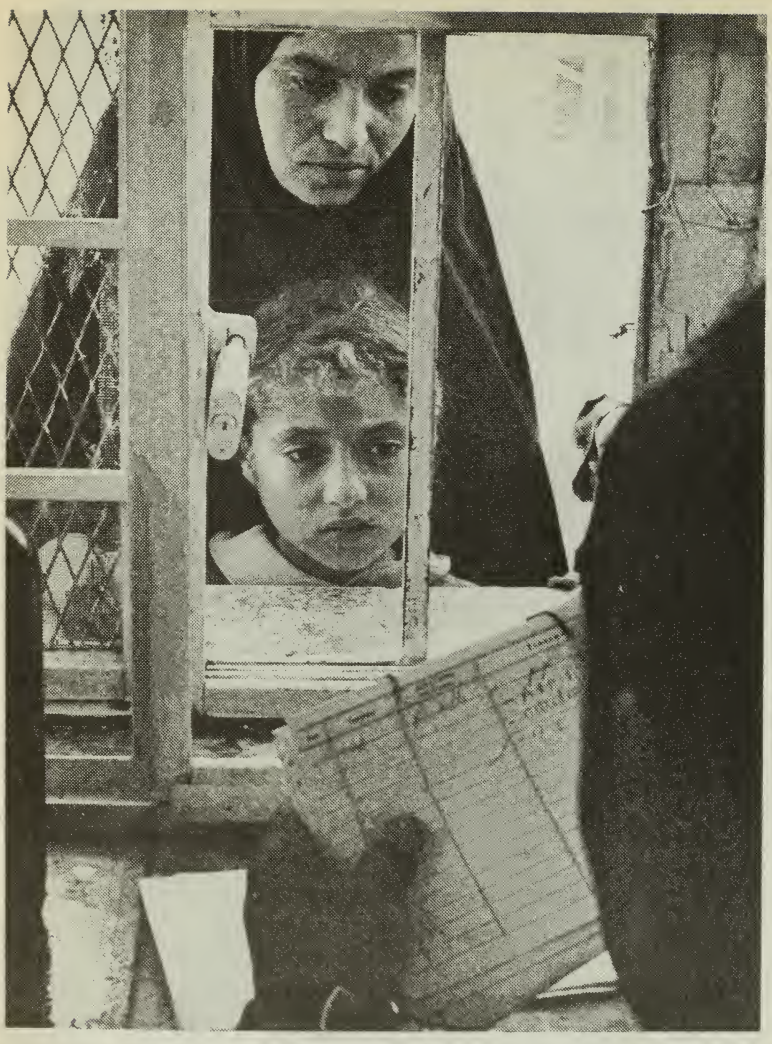
Improvised outdoor classes set up by volunteers from the refugee community were the only ones available to many of the children, Khan Younis Camp 1950. *UNWRA*

Emergency tented classrooms at Beach Camp early 1950's. *Hrant Nakachian/UNWRA*

The first concrete shelters to replace the tents in which the refugees had lived since 1948, Khan Younis Camp 1954. *Myrtle Winter/UNWRA*

UNWRA flour ration distribution, Rafah Camp. *Emile Andria/UNWRA*

Jabalia camp. *UNWRA*



Registering for rations at the Khan Younis UNWRA office. *UNWRA*

Because he was an official he came out to meet them open-handed, and they shot him dead in his own doorway. And during the curfews, the soldiers would shoot anything they saw moving, even someone walking in front of their window.

The worst atrocities of the period were the massacres at Rafah and Khan Yunis in which hundreds of people were killed. Gazans believe that the motive behind these massacres was the same as at Deir Yassin[2] in 1948 — to terrorise large sections of the community into abandoning their homes. Abu Talal, from Khan Yunis:

At dawn, just before 5am, we heard voices in the street and the next thing I knew, someone was kicking our door down. All my family was gathered in the back room; my mother, my wife who was seven months pregnant, three brothers, two sisters and my two daughters, aged six and four. My father had been killed in 1948. When the soldiers came in, we did not even know which country they were from. We had heard talk about British and French troops. I didn't want the children to be frightened so I came out of the back room with my ID in my hand and said to them in English twice, 'I am a school teacher. I am a civilian.' I was wearing my normal clothes, not my pyjamas as we had not slept all night. One of the soldiers shouted in Arabic 'Stand still!'. Then he opened fire on me with his rifle, hitting me in the elbow. I ran back into the room and my family held the door open for me. The soldiers fired again and my younger brother was killed instantly. My third brother was shot in the legs as he tried to climb out of the window. A second soldier then came into the room, took one look around and then emptied his rifle at random round the room. I was hit again in my leg and chest. Then they took all the women outside leaving the injured, myself and my brother, inside. My mother started to curse the soldiers and I remember one of them beating her with his rifle butt shouting 'Don't curse the Israelis, you should be cursing Abdel Nasser.' He was speaking in Arabic, but I couldn't tell from his accent where he came from.

I don't know why they chose my house. I wasn't anyone special. I heard later that the same thing had happened in many houses in our quarter alone. People were just chosen at random — ordinary people who had no connection with politics or the fedayeen. Outside I could

hear a lot of shouting and shooting coming from the Khan in the town centre. Later, I heard that dozens of people had been lined up against the wall and shot in cold blood. Some say thousands were killed, but I think that 600 is probably nearer the truth. There were corpses everywhere, and because of the curfew, no-one could go out to bury them for about four days. This all took place that first morning. So much killing in such a short space of time. I heard that it was stopped by a senior officer.

I lay on my back on the floor of the bedroom in my house for 30 hours with blood everywhere; it was on the walls and even on the ceiling. We couldn't get out to the clinic because of the curfew. I kept asking for water to drink, but my mother refused to give me any because she said it was dangerous to drink water if I was bleeding so much. I kept passing out. In the end, my wife brought me water saying 'If he's going to die, I don't want it to be of thirst in front of my very eyes, anyway.' We were all so confused and didn't really know what to do, but my family managed to bandage me up to stop the bleeding. When the curfew was finally lifted, I was able to get to the clinic on a stretcher. That's when I saw all the bodies in the streets. When I got to the clinic, there was total confusion. There was a nurse called Umm Walid, a good soul. When she started to take off my bandages, she fainted at the sight of my wounds. It was comical; me lying on the bed calling for someone to come and help the nurse so that she could help me! I spent the night at the clinic and the next morning, two soldiers came to look at us all lying in the clinic. I remember they even offered us cigarettes. The day after that, more soldiers came and we were taken to a hospital in Gaza where the town hall is now. Then I was taken for surgery where my right arm was amputated. All around me were people who had been wounded in the attacks — especially in the massacre in Rafah which took place on 12th November.

After a while, I was discharged from hospital, but my bandages still needed changing twice a day. One day, some soldiers came to arrest me. I remember one of them had a flowing beard. He looked at our son who had just been born and said 'Is it a boy or a girl?' My wife was so terrified that they would shoot him that she blurted, 'He's a girl, he's a girl.' I was held for eight days, then I was released again.

A few weeks after the Israelis left the strip a heavy rainstorm uncovered

a mass grave on the outskirts of Gaza. It contained the bodies of forty Palestinians who'd had their hands tied and been shot in the back of the head.

The Israeli withdrawal in March 1957 was viewed as a victory by Gazans and ushered in a period of much warmer relations between Palestinians and Egypt. Nasser was impressed by the unanimous wish in Gaza for the return of the Egyptian administration in preference to a proposal that the Gaza Strip be governed by a United Nations force. He responded by giving Palestinians more say in the executive branch of the government which had previously been run exclusively by Egyptians. In 1957 several Palestinians became executive council members as heads of departments, including health and education, which both underwent considerable expansion and improvement. Employment opportunities in Egypt for Palestinians were also increased and Gaza became a tax-free zone, which gave its economy the stimulus it so badly needed.

Bassam, an economist, describes the changes in Gaza's economy during the Egyptian administration.

Almost immediately after the chaos of finding a place to live, the drain of our work force to the Arab countries began. It included both skilled and unskilled workers. People earned good wages in the Arab countries whose oil industries were expanding rapidly and most people in Gaza lived on these remitted wages. But largely, the money wasn't remitted directly because of the strict Egyptian currency controls; so began a circle of investment. Money would be sent to Beirut banks, Gazan merchants would then go to Beirut to buy a wide assortment of luxury goods — mostly consumer items like radios, perfumes, clothes and kitchen goods. These were then brought to Gaza which was declared a sort of tax-free zone by the Egyptians as a stimulant to Gaza's economy. The market was stuffed with all sorts of goods which had never been seen in Gaza before. This attracted thousands of Egyptians who came to Gaza on shopping sprees to buy all the goods they couldn't get in Cairo during Nasser's austere regime with the £100 that they were allowed to spend. There wasn't much for Gazans to invest this new-found wealth in — the establishment of any major industry in Gaza had been ruled out through fear of Israeli attacks — except the citrus groves.

The land growing citrus fruit jumped from 6000 to 70,000 dunums

after Nasser had established markets in Eastern Europe. The Egyptians stimulated the growth of this citrus industry with loans, technical help, reduced customs and so on. By the mid-'60s, nearly half of Gaza's workforce was dependent on the citrus industry — as labourers working the irrigation system, drivers, mechanics and pickers. As the Eastern Bloc, where most of the produce went, often couldn't afford to pay for the fruit in cash, they would send construction materials and various machines instead. So that's how the circle went; money from the Gulf, consumer goods from Beirut, and industrial material from the East. It wasn't exactly a well based or well balanced economy, but it had its own energy and dynamism. Only a handful of people got rich, especially those colluding with the Egyptian officials, but most people managed to make ends meet. Apart from the citrus industry, the biggest employers were UNRWA and the government. A few people also found work in a number of minor industries such as carpet weaving, pottery and a small plastics factory. Incomes were fairly low but the Egyptians kept the cost of living low by subsidising basic commodities and supplying the market with cheap food produced in Egypt — onions, garlic, flour, tahina and so on.

Nasser was shrewd enough to realise that by 1957 Gazans had grown considerably in confidence and that he would have to respond to this new mood. For Nasser the problem was how to find a formula which would appease Gazans without relinquishing his overall political control.

In 1957 the Egyptians established a new Municipal Council in Gaza, but being an appointed rather than an elected body it provoked little interest and only served to increase Gazans' sense of restlessness. Cosmetic reforms were clearly not going to placate Gazans, so in 1959 the Egyptian Ministry of Defence issued an order stipulating the procedure for the creation of a national union and a legislative council. Egypt's preoccupation with outside events, the union with Syria and the revolution in Iraq, delayed elections for the National Union until 1961, and even then the Union's brief of organising people around national tasks was too vague for it to develop into anything more than a political talking shop.

The Legislative Council was half appointed from Palestinian members of the executive of the Administration and half elected from the members of the National Union. It had the power to amend the existing Mandate laws and introduce new ones — except over matters of security — but

from its first sessions the Council was effectively paralysed by Left-Right divisions which were quietly exploited by Nasser to ensure that the Legislative Council was never capable of challenging his own hegemony.

Nasser's popularity in Gaza rose steadily throughout the sixties. The formation of the Legislative Council was welcomed by most Gazans, his economic policies were popular and his public rhetoric continually restated his commitment to liberating Palestine, although he privately conceded that neither he nor any other Arab leader had a strategy for dealing with Israel. Attacks on Nasser by the West and other Arab governments only strengthened Gazans' admiration for the Egyptian President, and even the hounded members of the Communist Party voted to freeze their activities as a gesture of support for Nasser's leadership.

In 1964 the first Arab Summit was convened in Cairo and largely as a result of Nasser's efforts, a decision was taken to sponsor the creation of an 'independent' Palestinian political entity — the Palestine Liberation Organisation. As Nasser had spent most of his time in office trying in one way or another to keep strict control over Palestinian organisation it seems likely that his motive for pushing for the new PLO was to relieve himself of some of the responsibility of Palestine by co-opting the other Arab states, and in particular Jordan and Syria, into playing a more active role.

Ahmed Shukeiry, a Palestinian diplomat and staunch Nasserite, was entrusted with the leadership of the new organisation and in 1965 he came to Gaza where a PLO office was established. Yasser, a former member of the Communist Party, reflects on Shukeiry's style of leadership and the impact of the PLO on Gaza:

Shukeiry met many people here in Gaza and consulted them, but it was often in an individual way and spirit. He selected people from Gaza, with Egyptian approval, to be on the executive committee and later on he selected other people to work with him, mainly established figures; some people from the National Union and others who were mukhtars. He did the same in Jordan and Syria — selecting people who were approved by the host government. The people's reaction to Shukeiry and the PLO was mainly positive. It seemed that in the absence of any political action, it was natural to select rather than elect. Everyone considered him to be working with Nasser, and as Nasser was a national hero, this was good enough credentials for anyone. The

Palestinians were more Nasserist than Nasser.

Shukeiry was popular in Gaza, but everyone knew he couldn't do anything against Nasser. After all, he had selected Shukeiry to be the head of the PLO. Shukeiry was no revolutionary — just a skilful politician with a gift for fiery oration and rhetoric. He wasn't the kind of person I would like to see as my national leader. He was always making these speeches that never showed any realism and he didn't make much of an attempt to educate people politically or hammer out a strategy for going forward which the people could understand and be involved in. In 1965, when Shukeiry came here, Gaza became the centre of Palestinian activism, and people were filled with high hopes. He raised the level of enthusiasm to fever pitch as though the battle stage was set and everyone was ready for the shoot out. The more they became frenzied, the more he poured fire on them. It was ridiculous. You'd think he had come to take people back to their villages the next day. People reacted positively of course — everyone wanted to contribute, but the rhetoric in no way matched the reality of our situation. The people were misled — they didn't have a clear idea of what their role and obligations were.

It was decided to enlarge the Palestinian battalion in Gaza as part of the Palestine Liberation Army, and military training under the supervision of the Egyptians was introduced for all secondary school students. There was also a decision to set up popular organisation committees in the towns, camps and villages for which elections would be held. Prior to the elections a bitter rivalry developed between Nationalists, who adopted the extremist line of the expulsion of Jews from Palestine, and a bourgeois ideology, and the Left who campaigned on a social platform and for a return to the Partition plan of 1947. Nasser, with Shukeiry's support, gave the green light for the Nationalists to organise while continuing the suppression of the Left. The Nationalists won the elections, but before they could reap the benefits of their victory the Palestinians suffered the second catastrophe of 1967. Hussein:

Three days before the '67 war broke out, I was visited by a Lebanese journalist called Ahmad Said. He came to Gaza to cover the story of the withdrawal of the UN forces. He went to the border with Israel to photograph the UN troops lowering their flag. As he was

photographing, two Israeli soldiers came over and started to chat with him. They asked him what he thought would happen in the forthcoming war. He said he thought the Arabs would win. The Israelis told him 'Go and tell Nasser that we will crush him in two days'. When he told us this story that night, we all roared with laughter, because we thought the possibility of defeat was unthinkable. On the Monday night, I came home at 6pm. I saw the hills of Gaza burning, and I knew that the Israelis would capture Gaza in a few hours. Yet I was still convinced that it would be a temporary occupation before the Egyptian army threw them out. The defeat was a devastating shock to us. We were occupied. The little that we had was taken.

Notes

1. A dunum is about a quarter of an acre.
2. Deir Yassin was a village near Jerusalem where 243 Palestinian villagers were massacred in 1948 by terrorists belonging to Menachem Begin's Irgun organisation.

CHAPTER TWO
SOCIETY

"I don't think Palestine will be liberated without the women being liberated first."

The Israeli invasion and occupation of Gaza and the West Bank in 1967 marked a new chapter in the Palestinian tragedy. While the Palestinians of the West Bank had managed to generate a certain social and political dynamic for change and opposition to the Jordanian monarchy, Gazans had looked to Egypt and particularly to the charismatic president Gamal Abdel Nasser to return them to their villages. The comprehensive nature of the defeat in 1967 shattered this illusion and led directly to a search for self-determination, a forging of Palestinian nationalism and a need to understand the defeat which involved a more critical look at social issues in the Strip.

After seventeen years of Israeli occupation, there are still large sections of the population of Gaza who deny the importance of this process of self-examination. For them, the quest for national liberation and the overthrow of occupation supersedes the need to examine or restructure the social attitudes and composition of Gaza. Essentially this is a Right-Left split: the Right believes that considering issues such as the role of the family, attitudes of and towards women, marriage and social divisions is a luxury and an irrelevance while Israeli troops are still on every street corner and that all social issues will be tackled when the Israelis have gone. The Left, broadly speaking, sees the failure to tackle conservative social attitudes as a contributing factor to the failure to achieve that Israeli withdrawal. More radical elements in Gaza believe that one impact of occupation has been to strengthen conservatism and religious adherence — a process of

gathering in everything that is Palestinian (and therefore not Israeli) as a kind of buffer to the exigencies of occupation. It is a process of chauvinism rather than nationalism and a process which facilitates rather than challenges occupation. Many Gazans are clinging to ideas and beliefs that made sense in the feudal village society of Mandate Palestine but which provide no answer to the sophisticated nature of Israeli occupation in the mid 1980s.

Nowhere is this dichotomy more keenly felt than on the issue of the role of women in society. Many men, on the Left and the Right, felt that to ask if women were more directly oppressed by Gazan society or by Israeli occupation was both an outrageous and a redundant question. The women we interviewed were also surprised by the question: the spontaneous answer would usually be the occupation and then all the evidence of the interview would suggest otherwise. In this chapter, we shall be meeting Maha, a middle-class woman of nineteen from Gaza town's best suburb, whose energy is taken up fighting within her own family for respect and a kind of equality. Amal and Nabila are both dynamic and courageous women's activists but from very different backgrounds. Amal is widely travelled and educated. She speaks fluent English and Hebrew and has a comfortable house in the same suburb as Maha. Nabila on the other hand was born in Jabalia Camp and has served two long prison sentences for military and political opposition to occupation. She has an extraordinary vitality and personal courage which accepts no impossibilities. In contrast, Faiza, now in her sixties, puts forward a widely held belief that the woman's role should be supportive, as does Mona, whose everyday experience of coping with nine children, a husband and a home in Khan Yunis Camp means that she has very little direct contact with the occupiers. Her struggle is one of survival and the enormous strength she possesses is typical of so many Palestinian women.

The mid seventies in Gaza saw a significant rise in religious feeling. Indeed in Ramadan, very little gets done during the day and at night the Strip takes on a carnival atmosphere. Pressure to fast is strong. This rise in Islamicism is partly a result of a similar growth elsewhere in the Middle East and partly a response to the hopelessness and alienation that occupation has stamped on Gaza. Some would also see it as a failure of the nationalist movement to seize the initiative. Two religious women, Majda and Salwa, discuss their religion and the role it plays in their lives.

Majda, a student at the Islamic University, stresses the requirements of Islam, while Salwa, a teacher with great warmth and humour, also stresses the importance of the spirit of Islam in her life. Maha, too, who finds Islam difficult to talk about, adds her views.

The conservatism of Gaza is rooted in the strength of the extended family and under occupation the family has become the major buffer between state and individual. Nobody in Gaza lives outside their family framework and creating a family of their own remains one of the greatest expectations for men and women. While the family provides and cares for its members, it also can apply powerful sanctions against anyone who would challenge its authority. This pressure is particularly felt by women. Confronting the family is a very hard process. Two men and a woman talk about their attitudes towards their families.

Almost every man and many women come into direct and regular contact with Israeli society through work, trade or confrontation with the occupation forces. Exposure to Israel's western-style culture has had a significant impact on Gaza — an impact which is generally negative. A small number of young people are attracted to the bright lights and the greater social freedom of Israeli society but for the majority of people, the effect has been to strengthen what is Palestinian as a form of resistance to the culture of the occupier.

Marriage is one of the most talked about issues in Gaza. The traditional arranged marriage plus bride price may have become less prevalent on the West Bank and in neighbouring Arab countries, but it remains strong in Gaza, despite the increasing difficulty in raising the necessary money. Hassan, a law graduate, describes the pressure to marry and the problems in achieving it. His lament about the lack of opportunities to meet friends outside the family reflects the absence of any kind of organised entertainment apart from sport. It is one of the most striking features of Gaza that by 6 o'clock in the winter and 8 o'clock in the summer, the streets empty and become the domain of the Israeli patrols. Entertainment centres on visiting friends in their homes. Muhammad, a shop owner in Beach Camp with his own family, describes Gaza's social life — the lack of facilities and the constant reminders which make it impossible to forget, even temporarily, that Gaza is under occupation.

Finally, we asked people about the social and class distinctions within the Strip. It was a sensitive question which many were reluctant to answer,

asserting the unity of the Palestinian people. But Gaza, of course, has its divisions. The ostentatious villas of Rimal with their electric doors, Eiffel Tower television masts and marble stairways look across Beach Camp. One Gazan sends his son to an English private school. These divisions are sometimes rather crudely expressed in terms of a refugee/non-refugee division but as Abu Hani, a labourer in his sixties from Rafah, explains, this division has been blurred by the comprehensive nature of the occupation. Abu Talal, a leftist intellectual who works as a pharmacist, gives an analysis of the shifting class patterns of the Gaza Strip since 1948.

Socially, Gaza is unique: surrounded and occupied, with a real sense of helplessness and isolation. All sectors of the community feel the need for change, from the communists to the Muslim Brotherhood. Different groups have clear ideas, but the problem is that there is no consensus. After so many defeats, it is difficult for the Palestinians to feel any confidence in themselves and often in the outside leadership too. Nor is there any real perception of what the changes should be towards. An Israeli-style western liberalism is seen as contemptible by most people, a fundamentalist puritanism is unacceptable to many and an organised movement for social change based on, say, women's issues, is unacceptable to the Israelis as well as conservative Gazans. In this situation and atmosphere, the predominant sentiment is to preserve what is known and what exists.

Maha, aged 19, has one sister and ten brothers. She is currently training to be a nurse, after her family refused her permission to go to university even though her older and younger brothers will. Nevertheless, her upbringing has been comparatively liberal. She has had to fight hard for every concession she has won.

For as long as I remember my brothers had more rights than I did — in everything. They had more clothes, more attention, more freedom to leave the house, even more food than I did. You know in the Quran it says that women must be subordinate to men. My mother accepted this and practised it when she brought us up. It was as if she was following the laws of Islamic inheritance, one third to the females and

two thirds to the males. This attitude encouraged my brothers to try and prove their manhood by controlling me. It was ridiculous sometimes. When my little brother Ahmed was 6 years old he used to demand that I make him tea. If I asked him why I should do that he used to say, 'Because I'm a boy and you're a girl'. He doesn't even like tea! That's the way family and society in Gaza have taught him to think. A couple of years ago I decided that I wanted to go to the cinema with a friend because I'd never been before. When my elder brother found out he was absolutely furious. He said that girls shouldn't go to the cinema and if I went he would stand by the door of the cinema and stop me going in.

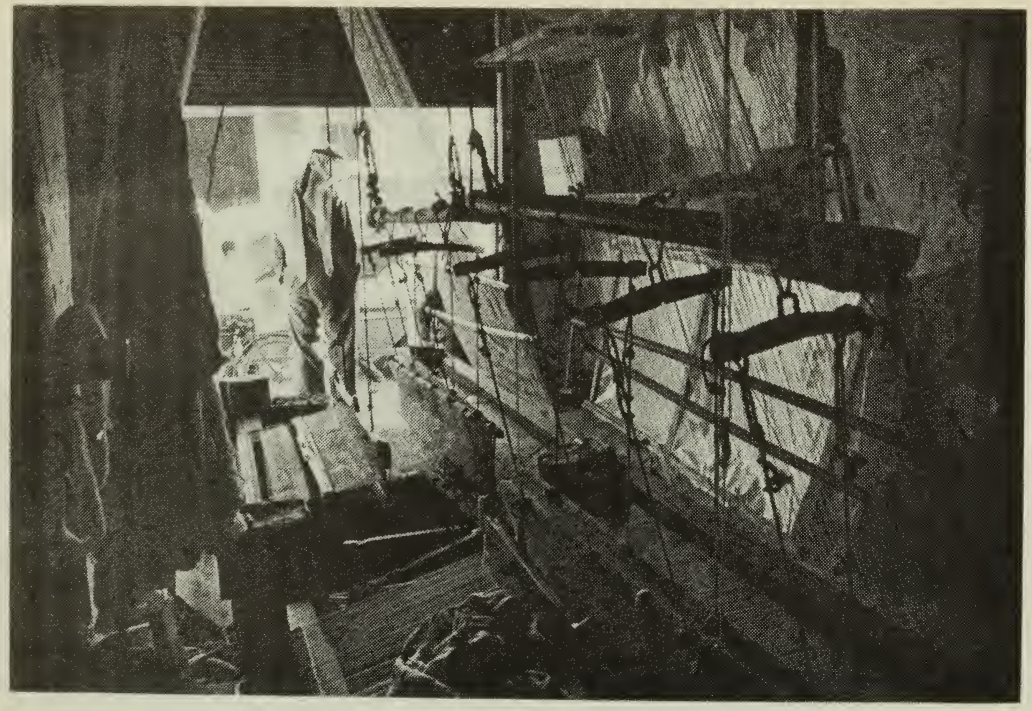
I didn't really resist this treatment until I left school. Before that there used to be some arguments in the school holidays, but mostly my mind was focused on school and exams and I wasn't so aware then as I am now. When I left school and didn't go to university, I realised that unless I started fighting for my rights, especially the right to go outside, all that lay ahead of me was a life cooped up inside the home. So I started enrolling in different courses, both as a way of learning something that interested me and as a way of getting my family used to the idea that I wasn't going to be a servant at home all the time. Every day it was a big battle just to leave the house. My brothers would ask me where I was going and why, even though they knew perfectly well where I was going, and then they'd go to my mother and tell her that she must forbid me from going outside. Sometimes she did and I'd have to miss my lessons. Actually, my mother didn't need much encouraging from my brothers. She's one of those women who do believe that a woman's place is in the home, especially the kitchen. She'd say to me that nice, polite girls didn't go out. Those girls who are mature and could bear responsibility stayed in the home. 'O.K.' I'd say, 'I'm not a nice polite girl. I'm rude. Now will you let me go?' It was like that all the time in the beginning, but little by little, as they saw how determined I was and how I was successful in what I was studying, their attitude changed and they began to respect me more. The change in my oldest brother was enormous. He used to treat me very badly, ordering me to do things for him round the house and sometimes beating me for no reason. Now he's much better . . . really nice. He's ashamed about his old behaviour. Still, even though things are better than they used to be, I don't want to pretend that everything's

perfect. I mean I still believe that there's something inside my brothers that tells them I must stay at home. What makes me sad though is that my mother's ideas haven't changed all that much, she's just more resigned to having a rebellious daughter. I'm trying to get my little brothers to do small things for themselves, like making their beds and keeping their rooms tidy, but when my mother sees me doing this she gets angry and says, "I'm here to do these things." But you can see how exhausted she is, and she doesn't have time to do all the work in the house. I always tell her, "Today I can help you with the housework, but what will you do tomorrow if me and my sister go away, go to university? How can you do all these things if the boys don't help you?"

When I finished secondary school I wanted to go to university but my mother wouldn't let me go. She said that she couldn't trust me to behave properly after she'd heard stories from my brother about the way some Palestinian girls acted in Alexandria. I could have gone to the Islamic University here in Gaza but I wanted to study English, and they didn't have a Faculty of English then. My sister Salwa will be finishing secondary school soon, so I'll fight for her right to go to Bir Zeit, or Egypt. I think things will be easier for her than they were for me, because, as I said, attitudes in the family have changed — even my brothers have said they'll support her if she has the chance to go. University education for men is taken for granted in Gaza. Men have to have a career so they must have a university degree to be qualified for a job. With women it depends on the family. Many families think that because their daughters will marry young, a secondary school education is enough. If the girl says she wants to work, her family will say, 'Look at all the university graduates in Gaza who can't get a job'. In a way I suppose they're right, but I don't think you should see university just as a means of getting work.

There are only a few women in Gaza who've studied things like medicine or engineering. They're considered men's fields. Women study arts subjects and end up being teachers. Once I was having a discussion with an uncle and I was saying that women should study whatever they wanted and work in every kind of job. I could see by his face that he was shocked by the idea. He thought that women should only work as teachers and when I asked him why, he said that if a woman got involved in other things she'd become less kind and lose

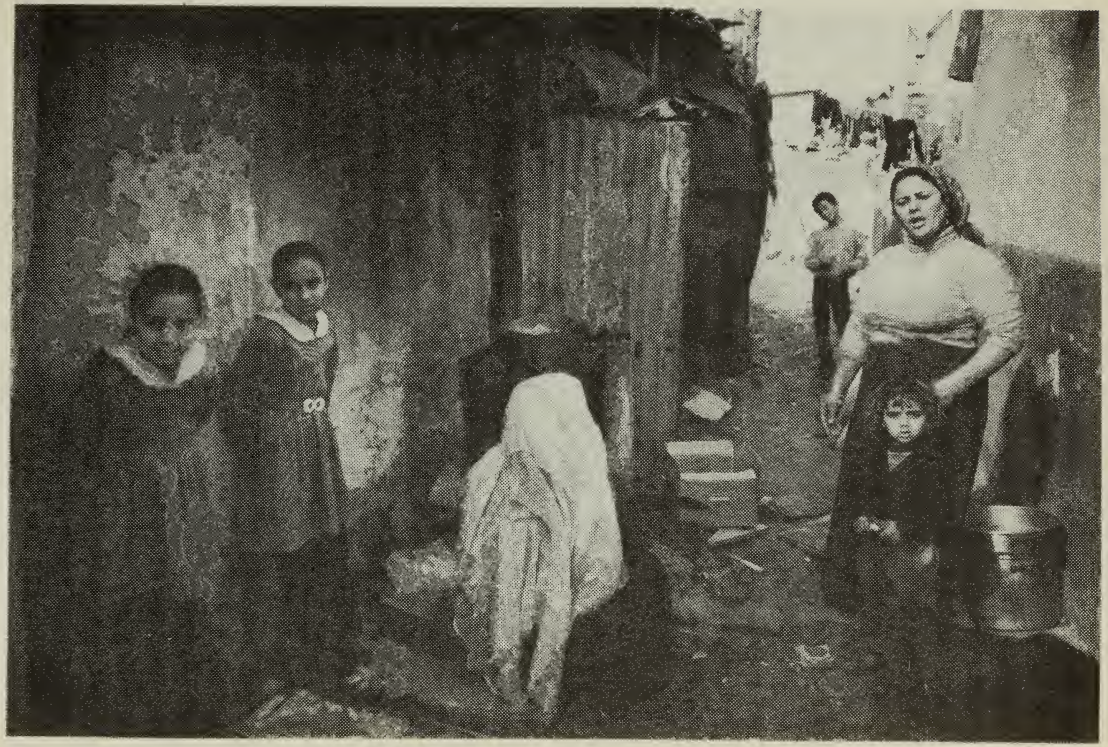
Schoolgirls, Deir el Balah. *Tordai*



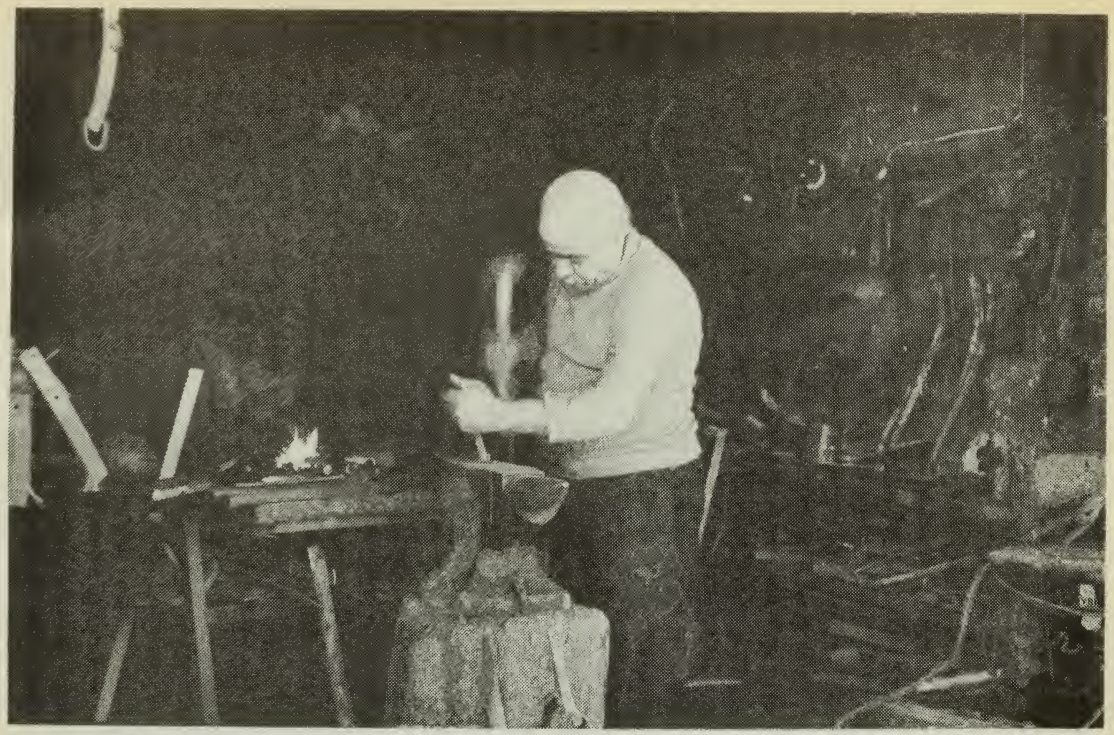
Weaving loom in Gaza. *Tordai*

Central market (Souq el Fras) Gaza. *Tordai*

Beach camp 1984. *Tordai*



Preparing food in the alleyway. Overcrowding results from the demolition of homes as part of forced resettlement policy in Beach Camp, 1984. *Tordai*



Blacksmith at Souq el Fras. *Tordai*

her mothering instincts. That's what men in Gaza think a woman's role should be, to bear and bring up children. It's not just men either. Many women believe that it's their duty in life to get married and have children. But what happens after that? They raise their children, and then they're finished. They look 40 when they're 30 and the whole thing becomes a vicious circle — they can never lift their heads above their home and children. For me there are so many things I want to do while I'm young, that I'm just not thinking about marriage. Why should I want a husband who says 'Stay at home, I want children'?

Nearly all marriages in Gaza are arranged. What happens is that women who have sons who want to get married go to visit families where they know there are young single women. The girls come and offer them something to drink, and all the time they're being sized up and asked questions to see if they're suitable. It reminds me of bargaining for cloth in the market. If they like the girl then they ask if they can come again. The next time they bring the young man, although sometimes he's not so young, to meet the family. He sits with the girl and if they like each other they get married. This is how it happens most of the time; it's only occasionally that people who've maybe studied together can arrange their own marriage, and then they've got to get the approval of their parents.

One day, shortly after I'd finished school, my mother came to my room and said, 'Maha, get dressed. You must meet some women.' I knew what was happening but I still asked why. My mother just insisted that I came, so I told her that if I did meet them I would tell them to go away and not come again. We argued for a while and my mother got angry and went away. I don't know what she told them, but I knew it was the only way to get rid of such women. Sometimes relatives come round to see if I'm available for marriage, but I hate the idea of marrying a relative and she knows this. When anyone from the family comes to ask if I'm free, she has the answer, 'My daughter's studying'. I'm frank with my mother now — I tell her that I'm never going to marry in this way. I must know whoever I marry before I marry him. My mother thinks this idea is scandalous. She always asks, 'Why are you so different from all the other girls?' I tell her that everyone has their own way of doing things and an arranged marriage is not my way. After all, who's going to get married, me or her? Sometimes my brothers joke with my mother, 'Why don't you make Maha get

married?' But I think she's given up on the idea of trying to marry me off because I've been so against it.

I think it's very important that women work because it's a way of being independent of the family. If a woman works, her family will respect her more. If I say to my family, 'Please give me some money' then that puts them in a position of power over me. Often, when my mother wants to restrict my freedom she uses money; for example she'll start threatening, 'I won't give you any money to buy new clothes.' 'O.K.' I say, 'I don't want any new clothes, I have enough'. And then she has to realise that that's the end of that. There's very little social life in Gaza for women — just visiting friends. Even that's difficult. I have to tell my mother where I'm going and who I'm going to see and exactly when I'll be back. If I'm not back on time, then I'll be forbidden go to out for a week. There are no clubs for women or anything like that. I can't go and drink coffee with a friend in a café because if I did, men and boys would stand around and stare at us. It's the same in any place where there are females. Boys wait outside girls' schools and say stupid things when they come out. You know, often when I walk on the street I get harassed by men — I get followed by boys on bicycles and men in cars who try to get me to talk. It's bad. Men just view women as sexual objects. If I want a coffee I have to drink it at home.

I have very little contact with men apart from family members. There are no men I know who I can meet and talk to as friends — that kind of thing doesn't happen in Gaza; it's impossible. If I studied with someone there is a chance that I can introduce him to the family by saying 'We studied together', but any other kind of friend is unacceptable. If I introduce someone as a friend, the family will say, 'A friend, from where?' If he's not someone from the family or a neighbour, it's a big problem. In the eyes of Gazan society it's wrong for two young people of different sexes to know each other. If there is a friendship, then the two people involved are immediately under suspicion; as it says in Islam, when a man and a woman meet there must be Satan between them. I'd like to meet more men, discuss things with them, but it's a very sensitive area. My mother always tells me, 'Don't do things which make people talk about you'. But later on, if I want male friends I'll have them, I don't care what people say. When I meet friends at parties and things, it's only rarely that we discuss

anything serious. If I start to talk about my ideas they won't accept it. They say, 'We just come here to enjoy ourselves.' Even at school when I argued with male teachers, most of the girls sided with the teacher. It was as if I was saying something they couldn't understand. They say that I'm looking for something that can never happen in our society. The problem is that 90% of the women here believe this. Even my friends agree with what I say, they can't carry it out in their own lives, they can't practise it, so what's the use of saying something if you can't do it? I once thought of starting a kind of consciousness raising group among my friends, but many of them who wanted to come weren't allowed to by their parents, and others weren't very committed so it didn't develop. I now understand that it is not yet the right time to struggle in this way. I've got to start with small things a long way from politics. I mean if I want to fight and struggle for anything, how can I say that women have the right to do things if I don't have this right inside my own home? I must start in the house challenging the attitudes of my brothers and all the restrictions imposed on me. My home is my base, and when my base is strong, then I can think of working outside in politics.

Amal, an intellectual and women's activist in her fifties, has very outspoken views which many people on the left would agree with but few would articulate. She is fiercely secularist.

It is worse for women: the effects of occupation come on top of all the social factors. If there were an independent state in Gaza tomorrow, most women's lives, in terms of their independence and freedom would not be significantly different. That sounds outrageous, but I believe it. I honestly think, and I feel this very strongly, that if our women had been more liberated, they could have played a very significant role in resisting the occupation; they could have been a very powerful force. As it is, half the population is cut out from participating. Some women are very active and you hear about them, but most are shut at home mopping their men's brows. But still, most people can't accept that the social restrictions on women have to go. Even those who realise this, will not actually do anything about it. I really think, and I know it sounds strange to say this, that for women, the most direct experience of oppression comes from the social restrictions they face.

Nabila, a younger activist from Jabalia Camp:

As a women's activist, I see my role as fighting for social change without which the Palestinian revolution can never achieve victory. Women's role in the revolution is as important as men's, and we must have freedom to move and express ourselves on an equal basis with men. This struggle needs the support, co-operation and understanding of men. This is difficult in Gaza because our society is more religious and conservative and so we rely heavily on direction and a lead from the outside. We take strength from the successes of Palestinian women in Lebanon where the revolution has brought about dramatic change. My aim is to strengthen women's confidence in their own ability to shape their lives and future. We run literacy campaigns for women and discussion groups. We encourage women to work outside the home. Why shouldn't women work in Israeli factories alongside men? Firstly this will increase women's economic independence which is the basis of social independence and secondly it will help men to realise that men and women are fighting the same revolution. It is our men who impose these restrictions and refuse to allow us to go out. Many families won't allow their daughters to go out unless accompanied by their mother or brother. People must have confidence in women. But it's very difficult to oppose your own society. I can defy and challenge the restrictions imposed by the occupation and authorities — the enemy who stole my land. I don't care if they become angry and punish me. But it's harder to defy the people of your own society who have the same aims of liberating our homeland. If I impose a siege on myself and stay at home, I won't be able to take part in the struggle.

Faiza is a long-standing women's activist who represents the traditional view on the position of women.

We cannot fight for women's liberation when we are under occupation. Men and women suffer equally under occupation, both politically and militarily. Women suffer by losing a brother or a son which deeply affects all the family. When it comes to getting jobs, there is no distinction between men and women. Women can even be lawyers and engineers — at UNRWA, 20% of all employees are women. There is equal opportunity in education, but of course if a family is unable

to educate all the children, they will choose the man because he will be the breadwinner and the head of a household. Would a family send a woman to university and leave the man to be a labourer in Israel? Of course not. Any father would prefer to send his son. If we had more universities, this would solve all our problems.

What is women's liberation anyway? The freedom for women to choose? But how can I choose to be educated instead of my brothers during this time of occupation? Women's liberation means something different in our society. Can a woman who joins the resistance support her children? Liberty is not about refusing to serve men.

Since '67, women have covered themselves more because of the presence of Israeli soldiers. Men must protect their women from the male soldiers. I think that women's role in our struggle is to sit at home and raise children in a nationalist way — this is how to struggle against occupation. Struggle is not only carrying a sword. Women should prepare the food, clean the clothes, seamstress clothes to earn a little money, but mainly they should provide a comfortable home for the men. Housework is a means of resistance. If each family had a box and kept money for those who fight, then the fighters wouldn't be so anxious about the economic results of fighting. Enormous progress has been made by women throughout the Arab world: I believe that even the women in Saudi Arabia are liberated, but that our women enjoy more freedom than in any other Arab country.

Amal again:

The effect of occupation on women is worse than on men because they live under social restrictions before occupation. For instance, if a male is deported or jailed, there is a problem because women have no experience of taking over, coping or being independent. It's hard to become independent at a stroke. Also, the extended family and in-laws still look on her as a submissive female and they expect her to be submissive even though she is the breadwinner. To a certain extent, occupation has been a politicising factor for women and there is enormous potential here. But the social structure applies its restrictions on women even if they are independent economically. A woman may be in charge of her own children but, when her daughter comes to get married, for example, it's the extended family and not the mother who

decides. Women are more likely to be kept at home because of occupation and those women who work for Israelis will be exploited in the same way as men are. But most women hardly have any direct contact with the occupation. The impact is usually indirect.

Mona is a mother of nine who lives in Khan Yunis Camp. Her husband works in an Israeli factory and only sleeps at home two nights each week.

I always get up early — at about 4 — wash and pray. I go to the kitchen and make the tea and breakfast before I wake the children. Then I get them up, dress the little ones — the older ones dress themselves — and give them their breakfast. Some of them go off to school in the morning and the ones who go to the afternoon shift go out to play. Most mornings my husband isn't at home because he sleeps five nights a week in Israel. Anyway, when the kids are out of the way, I get down to the housework: washing the tiles, doing the washing-up and putting the mattresses out to air. Then I go down to the market to shop with the baby and my basket. My husband doesn't earn much so I have to be very careful what I buy — vegetables that are in season, rice and lentils and so on. He earns 100,000 lira,[1] and this has to stretch until the next pay day, so as not to run out of essentials for the kids. My husband doesn't like me to borrow as it's always very hard to repay. When I get home, I make the bread and prepare lunch for the kids so that it's ready when they get home. After that's done, I usually have a bit of spare time, so I sit down and do some sewing which I sell to UNRWA's sewing centre. Two days a week, I go down to the centre to give them what I've sewn and collect some more bobbins of thread and materials. They pay us by the bobbin — about three dollars each — so although it takes about ten bobbins to sew a whole dress, and the work is very slow, it all adds up and helps bring in a bit of extra cash for clothes for the kids. We can make do like this usually, but if an emergency crops up, like one of the kids getting ill, then it's difficult. I try to keep a little bit by for emergencies, or we can cut down to the bare essentials like ful beans and lentils for a few days. I just make a stew of these things and keep serving it up instead of cooking a different meal each day. This is how we save up if there's a baby on the way or if unexpected visitors arrive.

There are lots of ways of saving money. When one of my kids

completes a school year, I take all the used books and go to a neighbour or a relative and swap them for all the books my kid needs for the new year. We always used to give these books away, but we have had to adapt to the tough economic times we live in. It's the same with the school uniforms: the boys' shirts and the girls' tunics all get passed down the line. I try to get them all one new piece of clothing at the beginning of the school year but you know kids, they don't stay looking new for long. As soon as they come back from school I tell them to put their old clothes on before they go out to play because with all the sand, rubbish and running sewage, things get spoiled very quickly. The kids are happy with their clothes though. I work them on the machine a bit so they fit nicely and they like that.

When my husband comes back, he's usually very tired after six days in Israel working long hours. So I get the mattresses and pillows ready for him and ask him how things are. He usually just says: 'Praise be to God', washes his face and hands and sits down. I give him ten minutes to relax, then bring his tea, supper and fruit if we have any, and we chat about the family and friends and things. Sometimes he likes to stay in to be with the kids which gives me a chance to go and visit friends, and sometimes he has to go out to see some people himself. I always ask my husband before I do anything, and won't do it if he's against it, although sometimes I try hard to persuade him. Usually he's pretty flexible and listens to what I have to say, but sometimes he comes back from work and his mind is as hard as a stone and it's best not to ask him things when he's in that mood. Sometimes he shouts at the kids. I just wait and listen till he's got the anger out of his system, then I say, 'Ya Ibn al-Halal,[2] not like that. They are too young to understand your anger and they don't deserve it. All kids are naughty from time to time.' Sometimes he calms down — sometimes he takes no notice. My husband doesn't mind people coming to visit me when he's away. If the visitors are men alone, I'll invite them in for tea or a soft drink in the summer, but I won't sit with them so they don't stay too long. That's how our traditions are. If men and women come together, or just women, then I'll bring them what they need and sit with them. If my husband's here, he decides who comes in, and there are some people that he won't let come over the door step.

In the evening, I usually put the TV on at about 7 or 8 and sit with a pile of clothes for mending — buttons and tears, that kind of thing

— and keep an eye on the TV. I enjoy the serials we get on Egypt Channel 2 and find it relaxing to watch and get on with a few things that I didn't get done during the day.

It's difficult to say anything about the future. Times are hard now everything is so expensive and the wages don't go as far as they used to. There's no hope of getting any help from UNRWA — you have to have more than 10 kids, no breadwinner and have to be in a really bad way before you get anything from them. But things could change so quickly, if there was a political solution to our cause and we got our independent state. I know now we won't be able to afford for any of our children to go into higher education, but if we had our own government, they'd be able to help, like in every other country. So, we put our hope in God and ask Him to look after our children, provide for them and make them good citizens.

Amal again:

I think men feel threatened by the dramatic and sudden change in women's society — by women's growing freedom. What men aren't? It's not only Palestinians. A man has to feel manly and when that is denied him, it's so easy to be over-manly at home. Men who work in Israel are very hard on their women. The explanation usually given is that he has seen so many shameless women in Israel, but that's not the real reason. It is because men are humiliated, oppressed and exploited — used as tools inside the Green Line. So all this frustration is taken out on the women at home. The Palestinian people have not had a normal social growth — especially in Gaza. Here everyone feels uprooted. In order to feel that we have roots and to prove ourselves to the world, many people stick to the ancient culture. If you ask men why they won't let women have more freedom, they say, 'What is left for us? We don't have land, homes or identity — at least let's have our honour.' When you don't have an identity, you want to cling on to what you have. It happens to all refugees in the world, but here it's worse, because we are refugees in our own land, in our country. Let me give you an example. I know a young woman who wanted to marry a man who lived next door to her in Nuseirat Camp. Her father refused to allow her to because they were originally from different villages. He told me, 'Supposing our problem is solved, and we return to our

homes, then my daughter will be in one village and I'll be in another.' He says this even though he knows intellectually that this is quite impossible, at least as long as he and his daughter are alive. Yet he can deny his daughter the choice of her husband on the basis of this unrealistic dream. The rejection of old values is seen as submission to the corruption of occupation. Because everything has been taken away, people want not only to cling to old traditions, but to strengthen them even more, and make them the very foundation of the community. Society here has not progressed since the occupation. Things have actually been going backwards. Being a refugee means being dependent — not just economically dependent — morally dependent too. This creates a belief that everything is beyond your control and that no one has responsibility for their own lives. So the occupation is to blame for everything. But it isn't. It is to blame for a great deal; Gaza has a long history of occupation — the Turks, the British, the Egyptians and now the Israelis. I must stress that I am not belittling the impact of the occupation in any way — it is the most sophisticated occupation we have lived under and the Israelis have refined the methods of our previous occupiers — but they can't be blamed for everything. They know how to exploit and strengthen the old traditions to use them against us, but it is up to us to change these attitudes. People must accept above all that women cannot play their part because of social restrictions. We must start making our own decisions and see the importance of demanding social change, irrespective of what the Israelis do or don't do in their own society. We need a separate movement for social change which is no less important than the nationalist movement.

Of course, one of the constraints is the growth of religious feeling. I don't mean just the fundamentalists whose growth is recent, but all those people who say only God knows what will happen and when.

Amal's point is illustrated by a story from a man who lives in El Bureij:

When I got into the taxi in Khan Yunis, I was in a hurry as I had a meeting with the education department in Gaza. There are two roads out of Khan Yunis going north — one is slightly quicker than the other. The driver asked the passengers which route they wanted to take and everyone said 'leave it to God, God will protect us, God is all-

providing.' When I said I wanted to take the eastern road, there was a tut-tutting from behind. It was as if by stating a preference on this simple level, I was implying that God would not provide.

Most people can see the big difference between the Muslim Brotherhood and Muslims. The Brotherhood have a political motivation and a vision of a future state based on Quranic law and traditions. This vision is not shared by the majority of Gaza's population.

Majda is a second year student at the Islamic University of Gaza. She wears the full Islamic dress including gloves. Her views are representative of the fundamentalist trend in Gaza.

I was born into a Muslim family and have Muslim written into my identity card, but until recently, I was a Muslim in name only. Islam is a whole way of life — a religion, a creed, a legal system and a code of ethics, so you can't just be a Muslim in name, although I thought you could. I owe a lot of thanks to the Islamic University here in Gaza for making religious books available to me so that I could read about Islam. I read about the proper Islamic dress, for example, and then I looked at my own clothes. I felt that I wasn't fully covered. I also felt sure that Islamic dress looked good on me. It was like putting on the clothes of chastity which protect me from the social strife caused by wearing vulgar dress. If only all women throughout the Muslim world would wear the dress that God the Almighty and Sublime had laid down for them, then the Muslim world wouldn't be in the state it is today, imitating the evil depravation of the West. I do my best to behave in accordance with the true Islamic principles, although I don't think I have achieved that yet. But, with God's help, I hope to be the good Muslim woman that He wants me to be.

But we are surrounded by unbelievers. Some women are just ignorant and it's our job as believers to show these women the way, step by step. Some have had ample opportunity to get to know Islam, Sharia Law and Islamic morals and dress. Yet they still stubbornly follow secularism. In the Muslim society that we want, these girls would be severely punished in the way laid down by God for rebellious Muslims.

As I see it, all Western societies are plagued by decadence and illness which results from this decadence. Look at their hospitals: full of

patients suffering from mental illness and depression brought on by decaying social conditions. Their society is full of suicides and oppression.

Our role as women is clear. It is said that we are half of men, but I believe that we are the whole society because on women's well-being depends the well-being of society. We are able to raise scores of courageous men who know themselves and their duty towards their society. Woman can fulfil this role in the home which is the position to which God assigned her — and it is the woman's obligation to bring up her children in the true Islamic way — to spur them on to Jihad in the path of God to elevate the glory of their religion. This is the woman's primary role in the revolution: she must never forget the fundamental role of hers — rearing children. We have embarked on five wars against the occupation and unfortunately they all ended in defeat. We need to rebuild and reform our entire society before we will achieve victory because God will always take the side of the pious as He did at the time of the Prophet (blessings of God be upon him.) War will not reward people who are Muslim in name only. So we must kill all the impurities in our Islamic society, such as the atheists and those Muslims who obstruct the path of the prophet, so that we can liberate the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem. This is our aim and I hope that God will help us to achieve it. Islam is a tolerant and humane religion and the Prophet (blessings of God be upon him) taught us to use our minds in a religious way to oppose our enemies.

The Islamic University here in Gaza embraces the idea of learning alongside a deep concern for pursuing Islamic principles. For example, it requires all women to wear Islamic dress and study of the Quran — the essential companion of every Muslim and the source of all Islam — is compulsory. I hope that the problems, such as students fighting each other, will be overcome and the university can continue with its work without disruption from the communists. I'm not against women working outside the home as long as they fulfil their religious obligations like wearing Islamic dress. They should work according to their ability. If a woman has the ability and experience to work as a spreader of Islam — a role which God has assigned to all Muslims — then she should strive to build a Muslim society which will win God's favour and will be foremost amongst all societies — a vanguard to the world — so that we can win back our respect and honour.

But most people in Gaza reject the excesses and dogmatism of the Muslim Brotherhood, Salwa, unlike Majda, feels relaxed and confident about her religion. She works as an UNRWA teacher and she feels she is treated with respect and equality by her colleagues and students.

In my family, there are three daughters and three sons. My parents always encouraged us to study hard and they made no distinction between me and my brothers. When I was about sixteen, I set my heart on becoming a teacher and my parents' only reaction was that they would prefer me to be a doctor! So you can see there were no family constraints towards my ambitions. They said a good qualification would give us independence if our husbands died young. I did well in my Tawjihi exam and was accepted at Ramallah teacher training institute. I moved into a hostel with some friends and we lived a very free life. Being a Muslim wasn't very important to me then — I used to go out, enjoy myself and wear what I liked.

In my first year, I actually failed an exam for the first time in my life, and this came as a big blow to me. I just couldn't understand it, then I came to see it as a punishment from God for my laziness and free life. I started to read the Quran and discuss Islam with my friends, and I felt through a deep inner feeling that I wanted to follow the Islamic way. I don't believe in chance, there's a reason for everything. I started to pray properly, five times a day, and I try to follow the kind of behaviour that is laid down in the Quran. This is what is important to me — much more than the rituals like praying, fasting and wearing a headscarf and long dress, although I do these things too. If I wear Islamic dress then people, especially men, must relate to me as a person which gives me confidence. To be a good Muslim, you should be honest, gentle and considerate, thinking more of others than yourself, and being strong and independent. This is why I turned to Islam — to try and be a better person.

But it's not important to me what religion anyone is: if I like them, then I like them. My family isn't religious, and my father always says it's all a pack of lies. When I wasn't religious, religious people used to criticise me severely and refuse to talk to me, which always put me off. I can't even say that I'm against communists. I know they deny the existence of God, but I don't know enough about Marxism to say it is all bad. This is why I don't think much of the Islamic University.

It should be called the Gaza University, because we have Christians and non-believers who feel excluded by the university. God gave us all minds to think independently. I chose Islam, but that doesn't mean that people who didn't are worse than me. The university gives a bad impression of Islam. They just use the name Islam to achieve their aims, in the same way as some people here, especially men, exploit their version of Islam to achieve control. That's the reason why I don't go to any of the Islamic women's groups here, because they only talk about Islam and I'm interested in discussing and studying wider issues. The best university we have is Birzeit University, simply because it has the highest academic standard. Working and earning a salary changed things in my family too. I'm no longer dependent on my father for money and that makes a big difference. But I still live at home. It would be a scandal in our society if I moved out and rented a flat, I'm also still very restricted — I have to tell my father where I'm going and when I'll be back, and I still feel the pressure to marry. I want to marry one day, but I shall choose and he must be someone I love. But these restrictions are not just in the family: it's every time I go out, especially alone. It's difficult and it faces me more strongly and more often than occupation does. It's the responsibility of all of us to strive for a better society. It must start in the family and the whole way we bring up our children. They must be taught to choose. This is so important. At the moment, we have no faith in the ability of our children to choose, so we dictate. When they grow up, they still expect to be dictated to, and this paralyses individual thought and action. This is our problem.

Maha, again, feels ambivalent about Islam. Although she defends her religion, she does not pray regularly and is unhappy about the sharply defined sex roles within Islam.

Most women if they don't have all their rights will fight for them, and the women in the west do the same thing. They've fought for their rights and I think they have more than we have. Because of this, and because they live in free societies, I envy them. There are some things though, for example the fact that they have relations with men before marriage, that make us unable to view them as good models for us. There are basic differences in our cultures. I think Islam has given

women many rights, but I also think that Islam is used against us. For example Islam gives the right for women to go outside to work, but if they do and the husband doesn't want his wife to work, he'll insist that she wears the Islamic dress. If she doesn't like it, then it's a weapon that's used against her. Personally, I don't think dress is important — women should follow Islam exactly as they want to.

There's a sentence in the Quran, 'Men have control over women', which men use to justify their domination and their supremacy. For example, men say that women can't become judges because they're not in control of their feelings and emotions! Sometimes I say to myself that I know nothing of my religion. It's difficult for me to talk about Islam. For sure women suffer from the occupation; the conditions they work in in Israel are terrible, there's lots of exploitation, and like men they're denied the basic human rights of freedom to speak and organise, but if you ask me if I suffer more from occupation or Gazan society, I have to say from society. Of course the occupation reinforces everything that's reactionary in Gaza. I don't think Palestine will be liberated without the women being liberated first. I mean how can our society be called progressive enough to defeat Zionism if half of that society is enslaved inside the home?

Although the family is seen by Maha as an oppressor and a constraint on her freedom, it also performs the role of a social service. In the context of occupation, this role takes on an added significance, although when it comes to providing for special needs, men usually take precedence. Yasser, a teacher of Arabic in Rafah who is in his forties, explains how the system works in his family.

My father is in his mid seventies now. He has to go to hospital three times a week for treatment and I always go with him. While he is being treated, I wait outside and then I take him home. Every month when I get my salary cheque, I always give my father one hundred dollars. I've done that every month for the fourteen years that I've worked. It's not something that I question or resent: it's our way of life. My brother was accepted to study for a masters degree in France last year. I remember we were surprised that he had been accepted and we hadn't really thought about how we could afford to send him. My father called

a family meeting. My younger brother agreed to transfer his salary from UNRWA to Paris and he shared mine while Ibrahim was in France. Plans to build another storey on the house were postponed and the money was raised. When I get old, I expect my children to make sure I have enough money for food, clothes and medicines.

The tightly-knit nature of the family accounts for the almost total absence of social crime, alcoholism, drug addiction and prostitution. This side of the family's functions is strengthened by the social and political threats imposed by occupation. In a crisis, the family is the last line of defence, in cases where an individual member of the family is in danger or in need. Yasser, again, describes a crisis in his family.

I was sitting with a group of friends after lunch when one of my friends rushed around to tell my family that our uncle had run over an old man in the camp and killed him. Immediately we gathered our possessions, locked the house, and all the family went to the house of my uncle. We did this because there was a danger that one of the dead man's relatives would come looking for revenge on our family. Even if it wasn't a real threat, it's a custom to do this because if we hadn't it would mean that we weren't afraid of the other family and so didn't respect them. This would have been a great insult and made the situation much worse. My uncle had already been taken by the police and locked in the police station for his own protection. When we got to my uncle's house, the members of our family had already gathered and there were about 50 men sitting on the roof. Some representatives of the old man's family came and we agreed that we should pay the temporary compensation of 2,000 dinars, and then after forty days, when witnesses to the accident had been consulted, we would meet again and discuss whether all the money or some of it should be repaid, or whether they were entitled to more compensation. We stayed with my uncle for another couple of days as a sign of respect and to let tempers cool, and then we moved back into our own house.

40 days later we met with the other family and it was decided that we should get most of our money back because it was an accident. Now the whole thing's forgotten.

But as Amal explained earlier, occupation is both causing the

strengthening of the extended family and benefiting from it. Certainly the family provides services which should be the government's responsibility, such as mental health care, umemployment benefit, educational grants and so on. But more than this, the preservation of the extended family reinforces the strict male-dominated hierarchical nature of Gazan society. The family's sanctions are all powerful. Dr Nabil from Jabalia illustrates this with a case from his camp.

The man is viewed as the master — the breadwinner. When a sick woman is brought to me for treatment, it's usually her family who brings her because if she becomes very ill, it is her family who will be responsible. I remember the case of a very distressed woman who came to see me. She asked to talk to me alone and explained that her husband was sexually impotent and although he knew this, he used to taunt her by blaming her for their lack of children. He also used to threaten to marry another much younger woman. Yet his family flatly refused to even consider her request for a divorce - it would have been such a disgrace on them all.

But whatever criticisms are levelled at the family, particularly its constraints on women, it has adapted to survive in response to the economic and political forces. Nadia, who served a long prison sentence in the seventies for nationalist activities, describes how her family coped and adapted to the reality of her imprisonment.

I wasn't allowed any contact with my family for three months, then I was allocated my first family visit. We were all herded into the visiting room and given a sort of booth each. On each side of me there was a guard and in front of me a wire grill between the prisoner and the visitor. I saw my parents before they saw me. They were searching for me with their eyes and twice they passed over me. I had changed a lot. They sat opposite me and my mother couldn't stop crying. She put her lips to the grill and whispered to me 'Do you still have your honour?' That was the most important thing for them. They were ashamed of their daughter being in prison. I forced my little finger through the grill and touched her hand, but she kept on crying. My father sat silently shaking his head.

But over the many difficult months that followed, they underwent

a transformation. Their shame turned to pride that their daughter was a committee nationalist. The jibes from the old-fashioned neighbours that their daughter was a "fallen woman" bothered them less and less. They respected my independence more — they treated me as a person rather than a daughter with all that means in our society.

Another factor in the strengthening of conservative forces in Gaza is the impact that contact with Israeli society has on Gazans. The majority of Gazans, certainly the majority of men, have some kind of regular contact with Israeli society, usually through work. There is a small section of the population, largely male, rebellious and non-political, which is attracted to the western-style Israeli society. Jamila, for example, who left school last year, is frustrated by Gaza's social traditions:

I got engaged two months ago to my cousin who is a lawyer in Gaza town. He earns a good salary but there is nowhere in Gaza to go at night and nothing to spend your money on. We can't go swimming anywhere in the Strip because men and women just can't swim together. There are no cinemas or places to dance, so we drive up to Tel Aviv and go to discos together. We both speak good Hebrew so can pass off as oriental Jews. The Israelis enjoy themselves much more than we do.

Majed works in a factory near Ashkelon. He, like most Gazans, looks upon Israel as an occupier, oppressor and a place of work only. He is a graduate and is respected within his camp as a youth worker and sportsman.

Several years ago, I took a taxi to Tel Aviv. Two Palestinian workers next to me were discussing Israeli prostitutes. I plucked up the courage and asked them where these prostitutes were. They just pointed out of the window at two women standing in a doorway. I was so shocked — I never actually believed prostitutes existed before then. I've been working in Israel for five years now and believe me there is not much that I haven't seen. While I am there, I mind my own business and get on with my work. I've got a friend who goes to Ashkelon though once a month for a night out. He goes from bar to bar with some friends

of his and then on to a disco to look at the women. When he comes back, he always says what a wonderful time he has had, but believe me, he is depressed for two days afterwards. He always has to pretend he is an oriental Jew or face the hostility of the Israelis around him. He's also doing things which are not part of his culture, but the culture of his oppressor. It must be very hollow and sad if your social activities involve you in denying your own identity.

Lots more young people are now independent of their parents financially which gives them the courage to stand up to their fathers. Quite a few young men refuse to marry their cousins and insist on choosing their own brides. There's also more alcoholism and drug taking, problems which were tiny before 1967. I think it is the same in any occupation — a small group of the occupied people try to copy the occupiers. It is only an expression of their helplessness really. Having this Israeli society next to ours strengthens the conservatism within our own society. It breeds a kind of hypocrisy among us. Some Gazans, especially those who consider themselves modern, go to the beaches in Israel because women can't swim in Gaza. It's not forbidden in law, but you can always expect some criticism from the people in general. But the problem is that Israel is used as a place to release tension — to do the things which you can't do at home. Before 1967, we had Cairo and Amman for this. It's often the people who go swimming in Ashkelon who are the most conservative in Gaza. If there was no Israel or Cairo to escape to, these social restrictions would have been tackled rather than avoided. We haven't faced up to the conservative reality of our society because we have always had somewhere to go and let off steam. Now it's not just the adventurous few who go outside Gaza — it's the ordinary people or the men at least. After they have had a nice swim in Tel Aviv and chatted with the bikini-clad girls, they can come back to Gaza and tell their sisters never to go swimming.

Marriage and its related problems are a big talking point in Gaza. Marriage is usually arranged and although this is becoming less frequent in Gaza town itself, almost no one marries without parental permission and approval. For young men, the problems are how to meet women and how to raise the money for the bride price which ranges from two to ten thousand dollars. Hassan, 26, is a law graduate from a university in Egypt

who has been disappointed by his inability to realise the hopes and ambitions he had on his graduation.

I graduated from Cairo University four years ago, and it's about this time that people in most societies are either married or at least thinking about it. I'm no different and for a long time now, I've wanted to marry and have my own family. But it's a very difficult process for us — you can't get married just like that. You have to have money — a lot — to pay a dowry to the bride's father, and enough money to buy the furniture and kitchen things to set up home.

I was full of hope when I got my degree. I thought this was a guarantee for getting a well-paid job. I imagined working for a couple of years to save enough money and then marrying a girl from Gaza town whom I had studied with in Cairo. We planned this together.

But when I came back to Gaza, everything went wrong. I couldn't get a job in the Gulf because all the employers wanted experience on top of qualifications and yet there were no opportunities in Gaza to get this experience. I tried for months. My family aren't well off and after all the money they had spent on me, expected something in return — especially as my younger brother was about to go off to Turkey to study. So I got a job as a litter collector in an Israeli public park — picking up the beer cans and sweet wrappers that get thrown on the ground. I didn't like being in a place where Israelis were enjoying themselves, but I had no choice, it was a job.

But after 3½ years of working, I haven't saved anything towards getting married. My whole wage goes on food, clothes, transport to and from work and a little bit for my father who is now too old to work. The girl I knew in Cairo was married to her cousin who has a job as an accountant in Abu Dhabi. He paid JD3,000 to her father. It is such a ridiculous system because so many Palestinians are in the same position as me yet our customs have not changed. You know in Cairo nowadays, couples get engaged, then both save money for their house and furniture together. It would cause an outrage here if it was known that the bride had contributed towards her own house's furnishings.

And where can I now meet women? At least at university I was studying in a mixed faculty and so had the opportunity to meet women from all over the Arab world. But in Gaza, this is impossible. We have no places where men and women can mix — girls aren't allowed to

go to cafés or to the cinema.

Actually, this is the real problem. I could always borrow money, but there is just no way of meeting women outside the family. And these restrictions just strengthen the arranged marriage tradition. I'm pretty sure that I'll end up marrying one of my cousins and living with my parents — there isn't really space, but I'll probably get the room where the TV is now, and they'll put the TV in with my younger brothers. Also, if I marry my cousin, it won't cost much either.

I try not to worry about things too much. Four years ago, it all seemed possible, now I can't see a way out. I disagree with all these social traditions but there is no way of opposing them. I can't just go off and get a job somewhere else because of the travel restrictions, and also these traditions mean so much to my parents. It really strikes you after you've been abroad and come back. Everyone is clinging on to how things were, because everything tangible that we had has been taken from us. Even if I talk about these social restrictions and maybe criticise them, my father gets angry even though he can't put it into words and then my mother gets upset. Maybe it will be easier for my kids.

It is not only those who want to get married who complain about the lack of any social life in Gaza: this is a situation which affects everyone — young and old alike. Muhammad, 36, runs a small clothes shop in Beach Camp.

It's unusual to see people on the streets in Gaza at night. People are afraid of being stopped by the Israelis and ending up with a beating or having their ID cards confiscated. And even if there wasn't this fear, I doubt if many more people would venture out because there's nowhere to go. Here in the camp the only social centre or place of organised entertainment is the UNRWA club, and it only caters for adolescents and young men. I'm happy that they have somewhere to go where they can play sport and sit and discuss things, but what is there for the women, the children and older people like me? There are no cinemas or theatres, libraries, gardens or restaurants. If I want to go somewhere the only choices open to me are a few small tea shops and I can't stand going there because they're depressing — full of sad old men who hardly ever take their mouths from their waterpipes. There are no playgrounds for the children either, so they spend their time playing in the piles

of rubbish that never disappear or damming the sewage with sand in the alleyways. It's not surprising that so many of the kids here suffer from parasites and diarrhoea.

What facilities are available to the people in the city really depends on what social class they're from. Nearly all the well equipped sports and social clubs are in the Rimal district so most of the people who go there will be middle class, like the YMCA for example. It's the same with the clubs of the professional organisations; the doctors, lawyers, and engineers. They're all in Rimal so it's mainly professionals from Rimal who make use of them. If you're from a poor district of the city like Shujaiya though . . . I think they're probably worse off than we are. At least the refugee youth in the camps have the UNRWA clubs to go to. There aren't any theatres in the Gaza Strip and only one small library in the Red Crescent. Gaza has three cinemas which are all old and run down. Most people have a low opinion of them because they seem to specialise in sex and martial arts films. A couple of times recently the cinemas have been targets of attacks by the Muslim Brothers. Usually when the Fundamentalists do this kind of thing there's a big outcry, but after the attacks on the cinemas there was hardly a murmur. I suppose most of us secretly approve of what they did.

About a year ago, I went to the cinema for the first time since 1967. They were showing a film called *20 Hours in Munich* about the Black September operation during the Munich Olympic Games. I went more out of a sense of curiosity than anything else, it's so rare to see anything that involves Palestinians. It was an American film so I was prepared for a pro-Israeli bias, but I can tell you that I came out of the cinema shaking with anger and frustration. The word Palestine or Palestinian was never mentioned and there was no hint at why, or what makes Palestinians seize Israeli hostages. The commandos were portrayed as having no political motivation, mindless thugs, while the Israelis were heroes standing up to international terrorism. What made the experience sadder for me was the reaction of the boys in the audience. Everytime there was a shot of a commando carrying a gun they cheered and whistled. I think they were oblivious to the fact that the film was little more than an exercise in Zionist propaganda.

On Fridays I often go down to the beach with my children or friends. It's the only place in Gaza where I can really relax and forget about

all my problems and the occupation. There are always people I know on the beach and we have the unspoken rule that there'll be no discussions about politics or anything serious. Sometimes we go for a swim or play a ball game but usually we just lie in the shade of a tent and tell jokes and that sort of thing. I've got a friend who does wonderful impersonations of the Arab leaders and we can easily spend an afternoon listening to him — I wish you could see his Qadafi!

There are a few restaurants on the beachfront that used to be very popular during the Egyptian administration, but they're not so busy these days. They're too expensive for most people. I think they only manage to keep in business because they cater for wedding parties, and that always brings the money in. They're also the only places in Gaza where they sell alcohol freely, which doesn't make them very popular with the Muslim Brothers. The Muslim Brothers have the idea that the beach is sinful. Not just because of the alcohol, but because men and women sit together and the men uncover themselves when they go swimming. You know, I was in a taxi once and we passed some young men playing football in shorts. I was sitting next to a Brother and he shook his head in disgust and said that such immorality wouldn't be allowed under an Islamic state. Those people aren't Muslims, they're just fanatics. They're against any kind of enjoyment which doesn't fit into their definition of what's Islamic. I go to the mosque on Friday with my eldest boys, and I think it's a social occasion as well as a spiritual one. It gives you a wonderful sense of solidarity to pray with people and it's also nice after prayers to meet your friends and exchange news. It also gives you the chance to invite people to visit you. You know, as Arabs, hospitality is a central part of our culture. At home our door is open to anyone who is passing by and wants to visit, whether it's just to chat or to share our meal. This is our social life, receiving guests and visiting friends. Often we'll sit out on the sand in front of the house with a pot of coffee and passers-by will come and sit with us and other people will leave. It keeps us together as a community. You know that there are 30,000 people living in the camp, and I think that everyone knows everyone else. Unfortunately, since 1967 there have been pressures put on us which make it difficult for us to preserve our communality. Most of the men who live in the camp are workers in Israel which means that they either spend the week sleeping illegally in Israel or else they have to go to

bed at 9.00 p.m. in order to be able to get up at 4.00 a.m. to go to work.

The effect is that most people's spare time is taken up with purely family matters inside the home. People just don't have the time or energy to visit each other as much as they used to. And then there's the television. Most people have TVs now and families are quite happy to spend the evening in silence watching an Egyptian soap opera. I don't like it at all — it was much better when we had to make our own entertainment. Weddings are our biggest social occasions. Someone is always getting married and invitations are always coming. The tradition here is that when someone gets married the bridegroom's family invite all their relatives and friends to a big dinner. A couple of sheep, or a cow, are slaughtered, and if there are too many guests to get inside the house, which is usually the case, an awning is spread from the front of the house and the men sit out in the street. The women gather inside the house and some of them help the bridegroom's mother and sisters prepare the food. The extent to which I participate in the wedding depends on how close I am to the families of the couple who are getting married. If I'm a close friend or relative, I'll probably help with the preparations and not leave until the dancing is over in the evening. If I'm just an acquaintance or a distant relative then I'll only be expected to congratulate the bridegroom and sit with the other guests for an hour or so. It's not considered impolite if I don't take part in the wedding. Personally, I find this kind of wedding appearance more of a duty than something pleasurable, but it's important that I do it because it would be disrespectful not to. We have two major Islamic feasts each year, the Id al-Fitr and the Id al-Adha, but since the occupation, they've become less joyous than they used to be. Last year the Id al-Adha fell on the anniversary of the Sabra and Shatilla massacres. You can imagine how that made us feel.

Gaza, like any other society, has its divisions. For many years after 1948, there were two populations in Gaza: the refugees from the villages in the north and the original inhabitants who were a traditional and conservative people, especially those in the south. For a long time, women from the town tended not to marry men from the camps. The refugee population was less well-off, usually without property and often unemployed. This kind of attitude has all but disappeared now. The Israeli occupation oppresses everybody and makes no distinction between town and camp.

The strengthened sense of national identity has almost eradicated the previous discrimination, but some resentment still exists. This resentment is strongly felt by Ibrahim, a graduate from an Egyptian university who now lives in Jabalia Camp. He works as a labourer in Israel. His view of the differences between camp and town is a rather extreme version of a latent opinion that it is those in the camps who bear the brunt of occupation.

I can't help but feel differently towards the town people. Sure we are all children of Palestine, but we in the camps are a dispersed, scattered people. You grow up with the feeling that you belong somewhere else — for me it's the village where my grandfather and father were brought up, among the olive trees and lands of Simsim. But my reality has been the Beach Camp. I grew up in the poverty and clutter of the camp, always in the shadow of occupation, a hand to mouth existence. It's painful to live in such a decaying environment. So I look at the town people as people apart from us. They've grown up with secure roots, relatively peacefully, while we've suffered curfews, arrests, assaults on our women and children. They do OK under occupation, they're the ones with the land, with something to protect, the big bourgeoisie. They splash their money around, go shopping in Israel and have dirty nights out in Ashkelon. They even throw parties in honour of the military rulers! We spend our nights locked in the factories in Israel, scratching a living, while the sons of the rich go strutting off to the universities of Europe in their new clothes.

I'm not saying that the rich don't suffer at all under occupation. The Israelis don't make distinctions between the Palestinians. But if you're rich you've got more flexibility, you're in a position to bribe the military. If you want your son to travel to Europe to study, for example, you lay on a big dinner, you collaborate. Those people have less sense of national duty, they're out for themselves. If it weren't for the occupation — I mean, if we had our own state — there'd be a social revolution against this injustice and exploitation. These people are robbing us of our wealth, our national wealth. But it's impossible to fight them now. And they are supposed to be the traditional leadership. How can I have any faith in their ability to represent me? Most of them have probably never even set foot in any of the camps.

Abu Hani, a labourer from Deir El Balah who is now in his sixties, reflects the more widespread belief that the rigours of occupation have blurred the old distinction between refugee and non-refugee.

When I came here as a refugee in 1948, a family that I had never met before took my family in and gave us hospitality until UNRWA was established and we moved into the camp. There was some friction at first between the refugees and the people of Deir El Balah. We thought they were very old fashioned, especially in their dress and social traditions, and they thought we were taking their land and flooding their already very poor services. I think this friction has gone now, though. The Israelis don't ask if you are a refugee before they arrest you. There are plenty of people in Gaza town who have suffered more through occupation than I have. There are many people in Shujaiya for example who lost all their land in 1948 like we did, although they didn't lose their homes as well. We all have the same leadership and the same national aspirations. We are one people whether we are in Lebanon, the Galilee or Rafah. What's more, there are plenty of people who came here as refugees and now have big houses in the town with a shop or small factory, so it's hard now even to tell if people are refugees or not. The only people who benefit from making these distinctions are our enemies.

The emergence of a class structure has been complicated by conflicting forces. The original residents of Gaza still dominate the area politically and economically and the bulk of the refugee population work as labourers alongside Jewish workers. These Gazan workers, because of their national struggle with Israel, do not feel a class alliance with the Israeli workers, yet they still remain excluded from the political stage in Gaza and exploited by the capitalists of Gaza. The issue of class is subordinated to the need for national unity and opposition to Zionism. Also, the primary loyalty tends to be to the family, which is the provider and the protector, rather than to a class. It is a dilemma.

Ibrahim from Jabalia, who believes there is a yawning gap between the camp and town residents, used to work in a factory in Gaza before leaving to find work in Israel.

People prefer to work in Israel rather than to work for the capitalists

here in Gaza — in the Star and Seven Up factories for example. Here, you work a twelve hour day with half an hour for lunch which you aren't paid for. You don't get overtime payment. You get laid off just like that and there is no way of protecting your rights. There are no unions with any bite and you can't complain because the whole system is sewn up by this tribal network of Gazan notables. When you get screwed by your own people, it hurts even more. If they don't mind screwing us, do you think they are going to mind collaborating with the Israelis?

Abu Talal, a soft-spoken leftist intellectual who has a pharmacy in Khan Yunis, offers his analysis of Gaza's class system.

It is difficult to describe the class system in the Gaza Strip. Many of the normal factors and indicators which denote class have been turned upside down by the political situation. For example, many of the refugees who came to Gaza in 1948 were well-off. They had left behind considerable quantities of land and they maintained their bourgeois characteristics despite their poverty in the camps of the Strip. In fact, I think we can say that the class system between 1948 and 1957 was completely frozen. The majority of people were living on UNRWA's charity and few had developed means of generating their own income.

But the period after 1957 saw a sudden change. Following the Israeli withdrawal, Nasser relaxed trading restrictions and as a result a new bourgeoisie emerged working in small-scale manufacturing industries — many of which were really cottage industries. This in turn led to the creation of a small wage-earning working class.

The biggest single class to emerge in the period 1957-1967 was made up of those people who made their money from petty trading and smuggling. They were just as likely to be refugees as original residents of Gaza. They handled the money coming from the Gulf and traded with the Egyptians who used to come on spending sprees to tax-free Gaza.

An increasing number of Palestinians in this period also left for the Gulf to work in labouring, professional and semi-professional jobs in the emerging economies there. Many of them acquired great wealth after the 1973 oil price rise and now form the backbone of the Palestinian leadership in exile. But this new class is not really a

Palestinian class. Their class identity is with the bourgeoisie of their host country — their power is not connected to economic forces in Palestine.

The Israeli invasion of 1967 and Moshe Dayan's plan to open the border to Gazans to work in Israel destroyed the small trader class in Gaza. Initially, the wages in Israel were good and these small traders moved to working in Israeli industry, agriculture and service industries. This is very important because these people did not have a proletarian background, but as work conditions in Israel deteriorated and inflation attacked the value of their wages, they became a proletarian class. As Israel has consolidated its monopoly capitalist system in Gaza by undercutting indigenous Gazan manufacturing industries and refusing permission for the establishment of new industries, this proletarian class has become totally dependent on Israeli enterprises. There is no alternative work in Gaza which could strengthen the bargaining power of these workers by providing competition to attract labour. I should estimate that seventy percent of Gazans are now dependent on wages earned in Israel. But this class does not yet have a sense of the power of the proletariat — they have no roots in Gaza and they could perhaps better be described as fallen petit bourgeoisie. But this petit bourgeois background also gives some reason for hope because they are not a conservative proletariat. They have progressive and entrepreneurial roots and this background, I feel, could be further radicalised by Israel's raging inflation, the failure of the outside leadership to bring about a solution of some kind or by unemployment. Indeed these first two factors are very much at work now although unemployment is still marginal. After all, Palestinian workers provide a much better deal for the Israeli capitalists and providing full employment to pacify us is a recognised Zionist policy initiated by Dayan and pursued until today.

The second development since 1967 has been the emergence and consolidation of a very small class of Gazans who typically have some land whose economic value has decreased — especially land which was used for citrus production. They have become agents for outside firms — Israeli and western — such as Opel, Volkswagen and so on. They have considerable powers within Gaza with links, for example, with the Board of Trustees of the Islamic University and, along with the tiny handful of industrialists who run factories, they make up the established rightist force in Gaza. They are probably the only group

of people who are making considerable profits out of enterprises based in Gaza and they tend to display their wealth ostentatiously — BMWs, villas by the sea, holidays in Europe and America. They also have close links with the outside leadership and have benefited from money sent to Gaza by the Joint Committee. Their economic interests therefore lie with that group of Palestinian businessmen and professionals in the Gulf who would prefer to get a passport to their host country before seeing an independent Palestinian state.

The remainder of the old class system of the fifties and sixties has also been changed. There is no real agricultural working class in Gaza. Farmers work their own land — usually small plots — and employ labourers on a daily basis during busy periods. For these labourers, a few days' work in Gaza may make a welcome change from work in Israel, but the economic relationship with their Israeli boss is not significantly different from that with their Palestinian boss. The Beduin used to form a group of their own, but dispossessed of their lands in 1948, they have been driven by poverty towards assimilation, mostly as labourers. Their situation has perhaps been worse than that of the refugees because they didn't see themselves as refugees and so didn't register as such in 1950.

UNRWA has also had an impact on Gaza's class structure. Firstly, it has created a small class of well-paid bureaucrats many of whom no longer live in the camps, but secondly, and more importantly, its comprehensive provision of education has been the means of social mobility and the only real alternative to proletarianisation. Education was the only way forward although even this has been weakened by the chronic shortage of skilled jobs.

The future seems bleak to me. Work conditions will deteriorate as Israel's economic problems increase. The possibility of a class alliance with Israeli workers is very unlikely because the very nature of Zionism precludes a class alliance and fosters national discrimination.

I wish I could say that I thought the experience of working in Israel was creating a working-class identity. Those Gazans who work in Israel are a migrant, day-labour force. Many are working in unstable conditions. There is no security. Also, Palestinians tend not to be working in sensitive areas such as power supply, communications or transport. The Gazan workers know that they are dispensable, so the emphasis is on personal and family survival rather than collective action

at the moment. Israeli employers are hated not primarily because they are exploiters, although of course they are, but because they are Israelis and occupiers. If there is going to be collective action, it is more likely to be over a political national issue than an issue of work conditions such as pay. We have the primary identity of a dispossessed people.

Notes

1. Although the Israeli currency officially changed from the lira to the shekel in 1981, Gazans still give prices and costs in lira. Mona's husband earns about seven dollars each day.
2. Literally O Son of Virtue, a term of respectful endearment.
3. The most common form of transport in Gaza is the shared taxi. The drivers wait until they have 7 passengers before moving off.

CHAPTER THREE

OCCUPATION

"In Gaza, anyone who engages in activities that the occupation disapproves of knows that sooner or later, they'll be punished — that's as certain as night follows day."

The Gaza Strip's Military Governor can sleep with the confidence that things might be worse. The hostility of Gazans towards Israel, nurtured by dispossession, injustice and the experience of a lifetime in a refugee camp, could easily produce a nightmare of Lebanese proportions. Instead the situation in Gaza, despite an underlying tension, is now surprisingly stable. True, there are demonstrations on national holidays and armed attacks against the security forces are still a feature of life, particularly in Jabalia camp, but these are becoming increasingly rare and in recent years have not posed a serious challenge to Israeli control. Why opposition in Gaza has been so successfully contained is the question we try to answer in this chapter.

The resistance the Israelis encountered after they'd occupied the Strip was much fiercer than on the West Bank. Large quantities of arms and ammunition had been buried in Gaza's orange groves by the Egyptian army before they abandoned the Strip in June 1967, and these weapons gave birth both to a fierce armed struggle and a mythology. Everyone in Gaza has a story about the fedayeen who battled against Israeli troops for a five year period following the occupation. Accurate facts and figures about what happened in these years are nearly impossible to come by, but the Israelis regarded the military threat as real and dangerous enough for them to embark on a wave of repression which left permanent scars on Gaza and Gazans. Thousands were detained and tortured, many were deported and in the early seventies General Ariel Sharon razed large sections of the refugee camps in a successful attempt to flush out the Palestinian guerrillas. By 1972 the backbone of the military resistance

had been broken: a victim in the end not only of Sharon's brutal counter-insurgency but also of internal disunity and a terrain unsuited to guerrilla warfare.

With the collapse of the armed struggle Israel began to consolidate its control on Gaza. The then Defence Minister, Moshe Dayan, opened up Israeli factories to Palestinian workers from the territories occupied in 1967 as part of a plan of pacification through the creation of economic dependency. The few fedayeen remaining in the Strip attempted to disrupt the flow of workers into Israel, but the situation had advanced beyond their control. Israel's monopoly capitalism was quickly undermining Gaza's shaky economy and as employment opportunities dried up, most Gazans had little choice but to seek work in Israel. Now, more than a decade later, the majority of the Gazan workforce relies on wages earned in Israel. The early morning exodus of trucks, cars and buses carrying workers 'inside', and the shop shelves stocked with Israeli produce have become potent symbols of Gaza's transformation into Israel's Bantustan; a vast labour pool and a captive market.

It seems unlikely that this cycle of dependency can be broken given the absence of organised political opposition in Gaza. Building political structures independent of Egypt wasn't a main priority for most Gazans during the Egyptian Administration because of the popular belief that Nasser's pan-Arab vision would eventually deliver Palestine from Zionist control. Those who did feel the need to challenge Nasser were either imprisoned or effectively marginalised by advocating a position which found very little support. The result was that unlike the West Bank, where organised opposition to Jordanian rule gained momentum, Gazans were unprepared to defend themselves against the rigours of the occupation. Attempts were made in the seventies to solidify opposition around the Red Crescent Society and the small professional societies, but such open political activity was an easy target for suppression. In the context of this lack of organisations to provide protection or serve as a focus of opposition against the occupation, mass dependency has become effective mass control.

That the level of repression in Gaza is lower than it was ten or fifteen years ago is a testament not to the liberal nature of the occupation, as the Israelis would claim, but to its sophistication. As long as the policy of dependency, which is admittedly aided by the divisions within the Palestinian community, is successful in neutralising opposition Israel sees

no reason to revert to the harsh tactics of the late sixties and early seventies. This doesn't mean Israel is prepared to jeopardize its successes in Gaza by tolerating any real Palestinian initiatives. Those who refuse to accept the Israeli definition of what is acceptable activity and what is not still pay a high price in Gaza. Most Gazans have suffered detention and with it the degrading and brutal treatment which is routinely meted out to Palestinians in Israeli jails. Often imprisonment comes to Palestinians from the West Bank and Gaza for engaging in the kind of political or cultural activities that Jewish citizens of Israel take for granted. In 1984, for example, an artist from Jabalia camp was fined and jailed for seven months because the Israelis considered that the colours he used in his paintings constituted incitement. As for any kind of demonstration, the standard Israeli response is still the bullet and the baton.

Ask Gazans what they believe are the aims of the occupation and most would share the view expressed by one friend: "The Zionists want to drive us out of our homeland, just as they did in 1948 and 1967. The only difference now is that they are doing it more slowly." Looking at Israeli policy in Gaza it is difficult to disagree. What came over most strongly in our interviews with people about the occupation was the way in which it infects every aspect of life in Gaza. Traders, fishermen and artists alike are being weighed down by increasing numbers of restrictions and regulations: nearly everyone in Gaza it seems is applying for permission, to travel, to study, to buy, to sell, to work. Doctors and teachers complain that Israel has used its control over health and education in Gaza to deliberately run down both services as part of a plan to ensure that the quality of life never rises above what is barely tolerable. And of course with each piece of land that is confiscated, with every settlement that is established, Gazans are being denied space for natural increase. It is a war of attrition designed to destroy morale and the people's willingness to resist. The Israeli hope is that either Gazans will knuckle under completely or better still, pack up and leave. So far they've been unsuccessful. Gazan resolve to find a way to resist the occupation is still very strong and the proportion of Palestinians leaving Gaza is much smaller than on the West Bank. Time, however, is on the side of the Israelis.

More so than on the West Bank, fear charges the atmosphere in Gaza. Many Gazans trace this fear to the savage repression which followed the Israeli invasion of 1967. Abu Hassan, a retired schoolteacher who was imprisoned in 1970, recalls the terror of those years and some of his own experiences.

I don't think any of us escaped the suffering. A few weeks after the Strip had been occupied, the Israelis embarked on a programme of forced deportation. On one occasion, the Israeli army rounded up all the men from my quarter and herded us into Jaffa school. The Israelis had two local *mukhtars* with them who told the officer in charge each man's profession — 'he's a labourer, that one's a teacher' and so on. The Israelis picked out the ones they wanted, put them on trucks and sent them to Jordan. I remember another time the army arrived in trucks early in the morning and grabbed all the young men they could find. Those of us who were around began protesting, but the Israelis told us not to worry because they were only taking the youths for a few hours to help in the disposal of those killed in the Sinai during the war. We never saw those young men again. As soon as the work had been done, their identity papers were confiscated and they were forced to cross the canal into Egypt.

Later on, the number of deportations decreased but the general terror against the population was stepped up by the Israelis under the pretext of subduing the fedayeen resistance. The situation was bad for all of us but I think the people in the camps suffered more because that was where the fedayeen were based. Sometimes a camp would be under near total curfew for a month at a time and during these curfews, the soldiers abused the people terribly — wrecking their homes, beating them and so on. Anyone who was suspected of having contact with the fedayeen had their houses demolished and on a number of occasions, suspected fedayeen were summarily executed. And all through this period of course, hundreds of people were being detained and tortured in the worst possible ways.

I was jailed in 1970 and because I was a teacher I was told to help invigilate the Tawjihi exams for the students in the prison. Some UNESCO invigilators came too and we all gathered on the roof of the prison; us and rows of teenage students sitting in the sun trying to answer the questions. There was a small room near the roof,

separated from us by a door and a heavy piece of cloth. Suddenly we heard this terrible screaming coming from inside. It was so high pitched and terrifying that we couldn't tell if it was a man or a woman. The students just carried on with their exams as if nothing was happening. A UNESCO man came over and asked me if I knew what was going on in the room. I just stared at the ground but when I looked up I saw that he was crying. He had no idea that these things happened here.

Israel claims that its legal practices in the Occupied Territories fall within the framework of international law. Ismain, a lawyer of longstanding practise in Gaza, believes that this simply isn't true. For him military law is an integral part of the occupation, a fact which accounts for the frustration and anger felt by many lawyers who practice in Gaza's military courts.

You can trace the draconian powers which the Israelis now exercise in Gaza to British Mandate times. In 1945, the Mandate authorities issued a series of regulations called the Emergency Laws which were a compilation in one body of all the regulations and laws issued in Palestine to deal with the special situation — riots and demonstrations that had taken place in previous years, especially in the rebellion of 1936. These laws gave the British absolute powers to deal with bandits as the nationalist guerrillas were called in those days. There was provision for all kinds of collective punishments — house demolitions, curfews and so on as well as detention and exile for those individuals suspected of engaging in anti-British activities. Possession of a bullet became a hanging offence. These laws also vested in the Military Governor, the High Commissioner at that time, widespread powers to issue any laws or regulations he deemed fit to deal with trouble makers.

After 1948, when the West Bank came under the control of the Jordanians and Gaza under the Egyptians, these laws fell into disuse only to be resurrected by the Israelis when they occupied the West Bank and Gaza Strip in 1967. This is a very important point because the Israelis claim that they are only using existing laws and not applying their own. But I stress again that these laws were not used by the Egyptians or the Jordanians except perhaps in a tiny minority of cases. Some amendments were made in the field of security during the

Egyptian times and there were military courts, but these were mainly to deal with cases such as spying, treason, bribery and sale or possession of dangerous drugs.

These courts weren't in session very often and most people weren't even conscious of their existence. More importantly, the courts weren't being used against the interests of the people — I mean they didn't cause any friction between the people of Gaza and the administration. On the contrary, Egyptian policy was moving in the direction of creating a semi-autonomous legislative system in Gaza through the establishment of the legislative council in 1962. So the emergency laws were a godsend for the Israelis. They gave them what amounted to unrestricted powers to suppress the local population and pursue their own political aims. What couldn't be achieved under the existing laws could be accomplished through the provision which allows the military governor to issue new laws, amend old ones and do just about whatever he likes in the name of security. Israel's use of these laws in the Occupied Territories directly contradicts international law. The Geneva Convention states that an occupying power cannot change the law applying in the occupied area unless it is in the interest and welfare of the people but Israel can get away with those violations in Gaza and the West Bank, because it is not subject to any real kind of international pressure. You know, back in the 1940s, Chaim Shapiro, who later became Israeli justice minister, was concerned about how the British were using the Emergency Laws to control Zionist activity. He described them as being "worse than anything Hitler could have dreamt up".

There are two kinds of military court in Gaza — the Harkave which is composed of three judges and can impose the death penalty and the Dan Yahid which has one judge and can impose sentences of up to five years. The military courts have jurisdiction over areas transferred by the Israelis from the civil courts such as tax and customs assessment and all cases considered by the occupation as security offences. Security offences include possession of inciting books, magazines, posters, pictures, music, flags and maps, unlawful assembly of more than five people and any offence of commission and omission against the Israeli Defence Forces, including being involved in a traffic accident with a military vehicle. By an offence of omission, I mean failure to report any information about any offence or planned offence against

the occupation authorities. The normal procedure in the military courts is not to bring anyone to trial until they have signed a confession which is then enough to convict the defendant, and frankly, this is a procedure which encourages all sorts of brutal interrogation techniques during the preliminary investigations. You know, all the prisoners who are brought to the court complain to their lawyer of varying degrees of maltreatment or torture; beatings, electric shocks, iced showers and so on. This kind of treatment was probably at its worst in the mid seventies, but since the exposure of Israeli torture in the Sunday Times and by Amnesty International, the degree has lessened. A few weeks ago a Canadian journalist asked me how widespread torture was. I told him that every prisoner alleges he's been badly treated. Not long after I'd made this comment, I was summoned by the intelligence who asked me what kind of torture took place in Israeli jails. I told him beatings, hanging people by their hands, hooding people and making them stand for long hours. He said 'Do you call that torture?'

Iyad, now eighteen, was sixteen when he was arrested following a demonstration in Jabalia camp. What happened to him afterwards, and twice since then, has been experienced by most Gazan males. As a recent report by the International Committee of Jurists pointed out, Israeli torture of Palestinians is often motivated more by a desire to humiliate and intimidate than to extract information.

There had been a demonstration at our school which finished when the soldiers arrived. The students had gone back into the classroom and everything was quiet as the soldiers entered the school. They went into each of the classrooms and picked out some of the students. I was taken along with seven others from my class. I think they took about the same number from each class so there were about one hundred of us altogether. They couldn't find enough transport to take us all so they stopped one of the lorries in the camp and pushed us all in the back. All the way to Gaza, the soldiers in the back with us were beating us with clubs and their rifles. During that ride, I was very afraid because I didn't know what was going to happen. I hadn't had any experience of this kind of thing before, but I had heard from other people that the Israeli soldiers do all sorts of things to make you confess to things. The first place they took us was the Military Governor's

compound in Gaza town. They made all of us kneel in the sun. Some soldiers came round to look at us one by one. One of the soldiers looked at me for a couple of seconds then just kicked me in the chest.

We waited in the Military Governor's place until evening when we were divided into groups and sent to different places. I was taken with my group by truck to Gaza prison where three intelligence officers came and spoke to us. They put us in a small cell of about six square metres, and called us for interrogation one by one. When it was my turn, the officer said to me that I had been throwing stones and standing in the middle of other demonstrators and urging them to throw stones as well. He said they had a photograph of me raising the Palestinian flag on top of the school building. I denied it all and asked him to show me the photograph, which he couldn't of course, because it didn't exist. He let me go and I went back to the cell. All that night was spent with them calling our names, taking us to the same officer and then returning us to our cells again. We couldn't sleep at all because the soldiers had drenched the cell floor with water and we didn't get anything to eat. We didn't see anyone except the three soldiers and the intelligence officer. The next morning, they made us take a cold shower at 5am. They made us take off our clothes and go into the shower room in groups of three and four. I put my hands on my head so that the water wouldn't cover my body, but a soldier came up behind me and hit me on the back with his rifle butt and told me to take my hands down. After the icy shower, we were taken back to our cells. In those first two days, I didn't think that I would be able to cope. I wondered what I had done to deserve such treatment, although at that time they hadn't done much to us yet. I thought it would be better to tell them whatever they wanted to hear and then be set free as they promised me. At about 7am, they took us for interrogation again, but we only said the same as we had said the day before. They wanted to see if any of us had changed our story to find out if we were lying or not. After this, they took us to a bigger cell. They put us into large bags that covered our whole bodies. We couldn't see a thing, and if we moved, we were beaten with clubs. After three or four hours of this, they came and took me again for interrogation. I went to the same officer and he started to tell me what an intelligent person I was and what a bright future I had in front of me, and that if I helped him now, he would help me later with anything I wanted — studying in Europe or anywhere I chose.

Then he asked me some more questions which I just couldn't answer, because I didn't know the answer. He came over and hit me and threw me out. A soldier than took us and hung us by our hands from the ceiling. We stayed like that in a corridor for another three or four hours and everyone who passed by hit us. One soldier was particularly brutal. He kicked me in the stomach and beat me on my back with his rifle. The worst thing was that you could be hit when you least expected it — like a punch bag. This pattern — beatings, interrogation, the bags and the hanging — lasted for several days. Then I think on the tenth or maybe the eleventh day, they hung me from my hands so my feet were just touching the ground. They made me stand like that for seventy two hours. All the time I had to stand — I couldn't move or do anything. I spent the time crying and asking them to come. When they came, they would say 'Do you want to tell us what you did?' I would just cry that I hadn't done anything and they would go away again. On the fourth day, they untied me. My legs had swollen like barrels, three times their normal size. On the eighteenth day, I was summoned again by the officer and he told me that this was the last chance to tell him what I had done before I was given a fifteen-year sentence. I just repeated that I hadn't done anything. They released me a few hours later.

Ismain continues:

The problem is that it is very difficult to prove that confessions have been extracted under torture. The onus of proof rests on the defence lawyer. He must determine who did the torturing, when and how, but as the prisoner is usually hooded during interrogation it's a near impossible task. A few years ago, there was the case of a sixteen-year old boy who was acquitted of four charges after it was revealed that his prison guards had tried to hang him in his cell. In court he showed the rope burns around his neck and cigarette burns all over his body, but as I said this was a very rare case and as far as I know no Israeli guard or soldier in Gaza has ever been convicted for maltreating Palestinian prisoners. Prisoners in the occupied territories can be held for eighteen days without access to a lawyer and this is usually long enough for the external signs of physical abuse to heal.

There are a number of other factors working against Palestinian prisoners in Israeli jails. Most prisoners are not made aware of their

rights when they're being interrogated and all confessions which the prisoners sign are in Hebrew, a language which most Palestinians cannot read. In addition, the unsworn evidence of the army stands in a court of law against the evidence of the defence and defence witnesses. During the trial of a woman from Jabalia, the prosecution charged her with recruiting seven other people to her organisation. All those people swore they hadn't been recruited by her, but she was convicted on the unsworn evidence of the army. Many of the Gazans who are now in Israeli prisons have been convicted of membership of the PLO. Let me just explain what that means. Anyone can be convicted of membership of the PLO if at any time in the past he or she was approached to become a member of the organisation and he or she said "Yes, I agree". It doesn't matter that all this took place fifteen years ago, that nothing ever came of it, that the person involved has since got married and forgotten all about it. Under occupation law, you can get six months to six years just by saying "I agree", or as is the case here, having someone say you did. Acquittals in a military court are very hard to come by. I've had four in thirteen years of practice. You can imagine how frustrating it is to practise law when the chances of success are so small and the legal process has been designed to operate in favour of the oppressors against the oppressed. What stops the whole thing becoming a ridiculous charade as far as I'm concerned is that unless I work myself stupid, calling and cross examining every possible witness, I'd just be selling my clients to the Israelis. If I work hard, there's a chance that we can avoid the maximum sentence — that's the most I can hope for.

There's no appeal from the military court, the only redress a lawyer has is to petition the Military Governor over the length of the sentence given. I've sent 10,000 since I've been practising, and I've only been successful a few times — usually the minor cases like stone throwing. Not that stone throwing is a minor case any more. A few weeks ago, the Israelis issued a military order stipulating that stone throwers can now be jailed for up to twenty years. I have no faith in the law any more, I don't even consider myself a lawyer. I'm just a priest pleading for mercy.

Adnan chose to work in the civil rather than the military courts because, "quite honestly, there isn't much I can do to help the defendants." Even

so he believes that the Israelis have overseen the decline of civil law in Gaza.

Prior to 1967, the civil courts did not raise enough money through fees and fines to pay for itself and the shortfall was made up by the Egyptian governor from the general budget for the Gaza Strip. Now the Israelis run the civil court like a profit-making venture. The traffic and general fine section has been extended at the expense of other areas of jurisdiction, so that the civil court now makes a profit, while it is supposed to be a service. Yet despite this profit, the facilities in the court are very poor. There is a severe shortage of personnel — judges, clerks and secretaries, and our courts stand in stark contrast to the Israeli courts which have every facility they need. We have a primitive filing system, hopelessly outdated and one small room for all the records and archives. When I last went to get an old case from the archive room, parts of it had been eaten by mice and parts had been damaged by water and sewage flooding from the drains.

Another result of this shortage of funds is that there are serious delays in the whole legal process. Firstly, there simply isn't the administrative and management staff to cope with the backlog. There isn't even a clerk responsible for summoning witnesses and co-ordination with the police on this is poor as they often consider civil cases to be trivial and are obliged to prioritise serving the military courts. Secondly, there are now fewer judges than before 1967, despite a large increase in the population, an increasingly complex set of laws to administer and an increase in the business in the area. So judges may have to deal with twenty cases a day, compared to four or five before '67, which they simply can't cope with. Because of the constant adjournments, many people have lost their faith in the civil court system and prefer to work through the traditional system of *Mukhtars* who make peace between families in dispute in the traditional way (*sulha*). But the *Mukhtars* are all appointed by the military government's interior affairs department, and usually they are uneducated and unaware old people who are not prepared to challenge the policy of the authorities so as to maintain their position of prestige in the community. Their role includes signing papers of verification for people, settling compensation in accidents or other disputes and advising in personal and family matters. So in this way too, the power of the civil courts has been chipped away. At the same time as there are these delays

and backlogs, Gaza has a huge number of unemployed law graduates. This is now a very serious problem, especially as the Gulf countries are employing fewer of our law graduates and they prefer to take those with several years of experience, which of course, is very hard to get.

There are about 270 Gazan lawyers, of whom 160 have licences to practise in the Strip, yet only about eighty actually practise. Of these eighty, I should think only forty make enough money to cover the costs of their offices and overheads. We have many lawyers working in Israel as labourers.

Much of Gazans' sense of insecurity and political impotence stems from the fact that unlike the West Bank, Gaza hasn't been able to develop strong political and cultural organisations. Ismain explains:

Unfortunately during the Egyptian administration in Gaza, no strong political or cultural institutions were established, partly because many people couldn't see the need for them as they had faith in Nasser's leadership and partly because those who did see the need were suppressed by the Egyptians. In the West Bank the story was different. Ironically under the Hashemite regime, which was less progressive than the one we were living under in Gaza, several strong popular organisations emerged. They were affiliates of a central body in Jordan which still provides funds and moral support. The constitutions of these groups included elections which provide an opportunity for opinion to be expressed and created a dynamism and an activism which the societies here completely lack. Consequently it's been more difficult for the Israelis to control the organisations on the West Bank, whereas here in Gaza it's been relatively easy.

Societies, trade unions and professional guilds have all been victims of Israel's determination to crush anything which might strengthen our capacity to resist the aims of the occupation. They could of course ban all these things outright, but they realise that there are just as effective ways to neutralise opposition while retaining for domestic and international opinion an image of a liberal occupation. What Israel does in Gaza is to control existing societies and the establishment of new ones very carefully. To establish a new one, a founding committee must be formed and a memorandum of association sent to the military authorities. People who don't have any record of activism will probably

get a permit so long as their aims don't contradict Israel's aims. However, once a society or union is established, it is controlled by an increasing number of laws and regulations which have effectively stifled most of the existing societies in Gaza and attempts to establish new ones. For example, no society can raise funds, receive money from outside or even hold any kind of meeting or celebration without getting a permit from the military authorities, which in effect means that their survival depends on the political considerations of the occupation. Those societies which do survive have no power or rights. For example, here in Gaza we tried to form a Lawyers' Guild with the power to grant licences, to reprimand lawyers who don't follow agreed procedures and to regulate the whole legal profession. This was stated in our memorandum of agreement which was presented to the Israelis for approval. The application sat for four years on the defence minister's desk and in the end we were given permission to form a society, not a guild, with no powers except to exercise moral authority over our members. The Israelis regulate the legal profession — giving licences and so on, so we are left with what amounts to no more than a social society — a place to meet, chat and play table-tennis.

I believe this accounts, in part at least, for the absence of any organised political leadership in Gaza and our vulnerability. We don't have any bodies which serve as a layer of protection between the individual and the authorities. In Gaza anyone who engages in activities which the occupation disapproves of, even if it's something as innocuous as voluntary street cleaning, knows that sooner or later they will be punished — that's as certain as night follows day. Sometimes the punishment falls within the so-called legal framework, sentencing on trumped-up charges, town arrests or a period of detention, but with many individuals, the Israelis resort to just plain harassment.

Mohammad, a thirty-five year old labourer from Bureij camp:

I've been a volunteer youth worker in our camp's UNRWA club for a few years. Most of my work involves training the sports teams, but last year some members of the club committee decided that we should start organising the youths to do voluntary work in the camp, disposing of rubbish, repairing UNRWA schools and that sort of thing.

Shortly after we held the first work camp I was summoned by the

intelligence people to an interview in Gaza. The officer asked me who was organising the voluntary work in the camp and for the names of those who'd taken part. I refused to tell him so he threatened me with all kinds of things and then sent me away. About a week later I was called in again for an interview with the same officer. I arrived at the military centre at 8.00 and was told by a soldier to wait. At 12.00 I still hadn't been called and I was told to come back at the same time the next day. The same thing happened that day and the following day and the day after that without any explanation. For eighteen days I went to the centre at 8.00, sat on a bench for four hours and then went home. I'm a labourer in Israel and for these eighteen days I couldn't work. I have six children and I didn't have any money saved so I had to borrow money in order to feed my family for that period. I'm still paying it back now.

Before Menachem Begin became prime minister in 1977 the Gaza Strip wasn't a high priority in Israel's settlement drive in the Occupied Territories. Since then settlements have sprung up all over the Strip. Potential settlers are lured to Gaza by the promise of tax concessions, enterprise loans and a lurid advertising campaign describing Gaza as the "Hawaii of Israel". Abu Khaled, a gentle seventy year old, spoke to us of his feelings at seeing settlements established near his refugee home.

My house is on the south side of Rafah camp and the road to the beach which passes our home has been under repair for two years now. Apparently, the municipality has no money. Just across the road, on the slopes where the kids used to slide on trays down the sand, we have new neighbours. They came and marked it out one day — a site right up against the border wire — and less than a month later the settlement was completed. A convoy of lorries brought down prefab houses; telephones, water and electricity were installed; little lawns were laid with turf brought down from our old villages; the circular fence went up, lit by powerful lights at night and even those big plastic swings and toys came for their kids — all in less than one month.

I don't know how many settlements there are in the Strip now, maybe fifteen, maybe twenty. Looking at them, all these little white boxes and barbed wire is like looking at a whole new world. I've never met a settler, never spoken to one: I only ever see them in their cars. They

seem to be mostly European and American. We have this feeling that the settlers are creeping, growing and encroaching, taking more and more from us. They've fenced off a bit of the beach for them only, with great signs written in Hebrew. We hear all sorts of plans for how they want to build hotels and tourist resorts along our seafront. Haven't they already taken enough of our coastline? They are pumping our water — deeper than our wells — and there's nothing we can do. It was bad enough being surrounded prior to 1967; now they are building little fortresses actually among us — in our crowded little corner of Palestine.

Ramadan, a journalist:

Since 1967 about a quarter of this overcrowded little piece of land has been taken over by the Zionist state. There are a number of ways in which Palestinian lands have been seized, but the most common is through use of the British Emergency Laws by which the authorities may announce the closure of any region for security reasons without stating the nature of these reasons. Often in these cases, the land is held by the military for a couple of years and then handed over to one of the settlement organisations. Land which was designated under Ottoman Law to be used for the public good, or is uncultivated, for whatever reason, is also subject to confiscation and is usually handed over to settlers. Finally, all lands owned by people who were expelled or chose to leave during the '67 war is, under present law, the property of the state — in our case, the occupier. Settlement plays an important part in Israel's overall strategy. It has two specific purposes: firstly it compromises the people's ability to resist, militarily or otherwise, because primarily the settlements are strategic strongholds, located and designed according to strategic requirements, and secondly the settlements in Gaza are depriving people of space for natural increase. Settlement policy is a policy of slow strangulation, not just in Gaza but in the West Bank and Galilee as well. We know this no matter how hard Israel tries to justify what they're doing — claiming the land is non-agricultural for example. This is nonsense. In Khan Yunis many farmers are now denied access to their land, and in the north we have a situation where some farmers have to obtain permission from the military every time they want to tend their fields.

The destruction of an independent economy in Gaza has been an ongoing aim of the occupation since 1967. By transforming Gaza into a labour pool and a market for Israeli goods, Israel hopes to destroy the economic basis necessary for a future independent state and the Palestinian resolve to keep resisting. Bassam, an economist and journalist:

Quite simply, there is no economy in Gaza now, in fact there is not even a trace of one. Gaza is just a big slum — a Bantustan — with half-a-million people living in misery either as slave labourers in Israel, or as recipients of money sent home from family members in the Gulf. The few people who are involved in indigenous industries are struggling to make ends meet. If you look at Gaza's traditional economic mainstay, the citrus industry, you can see that it's in a state of collapse. The key to the success of any industry is the ability to sell your produce but we Gazans have no control over marketing. That's in the hands of the Israelis. Unlike most governments which give protection and support to enterprises operating under their jurisdiction, Israel is only interested in bleeding us slowly to death. They are doing this easily in Gaza by denying us the right to export to Western Europe, by imposing crippling taxes and by subjecting us to completely unfair economic practices.

Farid's family have been exporting citrus since the 1950s. They used to be wealthy, but since the occupation, and especially during the last few years, their fortunes have declined dramatically. Farid details his struggle against the Israeli restrictions which threaten to overwhelm him.

Nowadays, some citrus is exported to Eastern Europe. We have to send it via Yugoslavia because the Eastern Bloc countries refuse to import anything directly from Israel. The quantities exported are small and the terms of the agreements are not good. Last year for example, it was agreed that we should export citrus in exchange for goods because the Eastern Europeans don't have much hard currency. So for our oranges, we got sheep, iron, wood and furniture. Because these goods would compete with Israeli goods, they slapped heavy taxes on them and they became too expensive for the market. On top of all this, they insisted that all the sheep be slaughtered and the meat sold within a month. By the end of the month, the meat was being sold for next

to nothing! With Yugoslavia, a ridiculous contract was negotiated whereby we would give them oranges and they would give us the wooden crates to put the oranges in. Later, we managed to renegotiate it so that we could import the actual wood for the boxes as we have a packing factory in Nuseirat which has to import the wood from Israel.

About half of our produce goes to the Arab countries via Jordan. For each crate of oranges exported to Jordan, I get two dinars but fifty piastres of this must cover the cost of the crate. Thirty piastres goes to the truck driver for transport and 24 piastres goes to the factory for sorting and commission. In addition to this we have administrative fees to pay, whenever we export. If we export to Jordan we must pay fees to Shawwa[1] who acts as Jordan's agent and also to the Ministry of Agriculture in Israel. If we sell to Eastern Europe we have to pay to the Chamber of Commerce and the Israelis, and if we export to Israel we have to pay their ministry also. You see the Israelis always demand their cut even though all we get for these administrative fees is a piece of paper. There are also a number of different taxes. Firstly, the Ministry of Agriculture takes one and a half dinars for every ton we export, and if we are exporting to Jordan we must pay five dinars to the Israelis at the Allenby Bridge for each truck. When the produce is sold in Jordan I'm paid with a dollar cheque. When I put the cheque into my Israeli bank account, they give me the money in shekels. I then have to go to the black market and buy dollars and dinars because the farmers refuse to accept shekels as payment. This whole procedure is losing me up to 20% of what I earn because there is a big difference between the official rate of exchange and the black market rate. Some merchants still have all their money in Jordan because to transfer it at this time would mean huge losses for them. And of course the farmers are always at their heels pressing them for payment.

This inflation trap bites in another way. When I buy my crates I pay 15% tax but in theory I'm supposed to recoup this money when I prove that the boxes have been exported. What actually happens though is that I don't get the money back for two or three months by which time the shekel has been devalued to such an extent that I'm only getting 5% back. Sometimes they give an excuse for me not getting any of it back at all. They tell me that my papers are incorrect because the invoice is in dinars and not in shekels. If you want to protest against this, your only option for redress under occupation is the military judge,

and you know what that means!

Income tax must be paid on top of this and income tax for us is just robbery. Because our invoices are Jordanian, and Jordan does not have relations with Israel, the Israelis refuse to recognise them and instead make an assessment which could be totally unrelated to your earnings. It depends on the whim of the Israelis. Last year they took one hundred shekels per ton of citrus even though most of the exporters made no profit at all. This year we don't know what the tax is going to be. I saw the representative from the ministry last week and he asked me to pay 300 shekels. I told him that I didn't have any money but he threatened that if I didn't agree to pay 300 shekels now, he would make me pay 1000 later. They demand this money even though they know we're losing money.

About a quarter of our produce goes to Israeli juice factories — various people have applied to open a canning or a juice factory here in Gaza but the Israelis have always refused permission. We only sell poor quality fruit to juice factories and the prices are low — 18 dollars per ton compared to the 55 dollars we get from the Jordanian market. The juice factories also buy citrus from Israeli growers, but they are guaranteed fixed prices through government control, while we are left to flounder in a free market jungle where all the odds are stacked against us. If the Israelis can't use their control over marketing and taxation to cripple us then they're quite prepared to use other means. There have been a number of cases where certain producers have been punished for their outspokenness by having their produce stopped at the Allenby Bridge just long enough for it to start rotting and become unsellable. We're completely at their mercy and they know it.

The story is no different for Gaza's farmers — citrus production is no longer profitable. Each year the land area devoted to citrus production declines and each year a bigger percentage of the crop is left to rot on the trees. Abu Husam, who farms a few dunums in the south of the Strip, is pessimistic about his future as a farmer and the future of the industry.

I can quite honestly say that anyone who is looking after their trees properly — spraying, irrigating and fertilising them as they should be — cannot make any money in Gaza. Because of the falling price for citrus fruits, I'm just not able to maintain my trees properly. For a

grove like mine, although it's not very big, you need sixty workers for three or four days a year to repair the irrigation channels, dig over the land and prune the trees. For the last couple of years though, I just haven't been able to hire the labour I've needed because I simply don't have the money. My brothers and I have managed to do the essential work ourselves but all the rest we've left to God's providence.

The problem of water is also a big headache. You know I think the price of water is more expensive than the juice of an orange! Nearly all the pumps in use in Gaza were installed before 1947, like mine, and they're extremely costly to repair and maintain. If you don't have a pump, then you must buy the water and the use of a pump from your neighbour at a cost of 6 dinars per hour. If a farmer has sandy soil he'll need at least one hour of water per dunum per week. The Agricultural Ministry assigns us a certain amount of water per dunum per week depending on what type of soil we have. If we use more than our quota we must pay extra, and for farmers like me who have sandy soil, the quota just isn't sufficient. Of course the quotas apply only to Palestinians, not the Israeli settlers. They can pump all day and all night and sink deep new wells, whereas we've been forbidden to do so since 1967. The result is that the water we have access to is becoming more and more saline. You can taste it from the taps in the house — it's salty.

I can only afford to fertilise one quarter of my land each year because the price of fertiliser is too high for me. I'm forced to buy Israeli fertiliser even though Egyptian fertiliser is a fraction of the cost. For sure Israeli farmers pay the same price as we do for the fertilisers, but they get compensation by means of government subsidies and loans. We get nothing of that kind in Gaza and yet we all have to pay a land tax and a production tax. I can sell my oranges either directly to the exporter or to a middleman. The advantage of selling to a middleman is that you get your money right away whereas if you sell to the exporter it can be five or six months before you're paid. I sold to the exporter this year and I'm still waiting for my money. Every time I go to his office it's the same story, "I can't give you the money yet because I haven't transferred it from Jordan." There's no chance of me exporting directly to Jordan or the Israeli canning factories because the agricultural division here and the Jordanian Ministry of Agriculture only deal with a small number of rich merchants. I don't know what

the future holds for me. Like all the farmers in Gaza I get some financial help from the Joint Fund which is enabling me to keep my head above water, but if things go on like this I don't know if it'll be worth my while to keep on cultivating my trees. It used to be that the owner of a citrus grove was a wealthy man, but now I think the only people who are making a profit from citrus production at the moment are the big landowners — having a lot of land is more cost-effective — and those farmers who are lucky enough to have clay soil and young trees. After a certain age an orange tree produces less, and here in Gaza, under occupation, it is forbidden for us to replant or replace our trees without the permission of the authorities. They give all kinds of reasons for this refusal, like there's a world glut or not enough water or something, but we know the real reason is that they're trying to kill the citrus industry. The only choice for me is to plant new saplings beside the trees I have now and cut down the old ones when the new ones are mature enough. If we had control over marketing and a farmers' union to protect our interests I'm sure we'd have problems, but because the Israelis have said that we should have neither of these I'm not too optimistic about the future. Maybe if you come back in twenty or twenty-five years you won't see a single citrus tree in Gaza.

Bassam again:

The Israelis are advising farmers to change over from citrus to other agricultural produce. I say advise but I think coerce is more appropriate because they have the ultimate control over what gets planted and what doesn't. Anyway, this changeover is proving to be a non-plan so far as we're concerned. We over-produce for our own market and we're undercut by the Israelis because of the subsidies their farmers get. So now we are left with fields of rotting cucumbers because their market value is less than the cost of picking and transporting them. In the Deir El Balah region there are 30,000 dunums of vegetables — some of which are under contract to AGREXCO, the Israeli vegetable marketing monopoly. But these contracts don't give any guarantee of purchase at the end of the day — sometimes they buy if things have ripened earlier in Gaza than in Israel but sometimes they just cancel orders at the last minute, even when the vegetables are on the truck, and the farmer is left high and dry. Recently there was an EEC initiative to buy

vegetables from Gaza, but the whole plan was hijacked by AGREXCO which said that the produce had to be sold through them and they would decide how much to pay the farmers.

Fishing has always been a major industry along the coast of Palestine — in Haifa, Acco, Jaffa and Gaza. Since 1967 this industry has declined as rising restrictions and competition have taken their toll. Tariq, a fisherman from Beach Camp:

My family were fishermen in Jaffa. We made a pretty good living out of it and I remember as a child that we were well-off. In 1948, we were driven south and came to Beach Camp. My father had left everything behind — the boats, nets, crates — everything. He bought a boat in the early fifties and started again from scratch. Times were hard in the Egyptian period — there wasn't much money about and we had to struggle to make ends meet. By 1967, we had two boats, each with a crew of seven. For six months after the war, there was no fishing at all. We weren't allowed onto the sea. Then we were issued with licences and we got going again. We could fish from Erez[2] to Port Said, but not beyond that. And we were curfewed as we still are now. Not one is allowed to launch or land between 8pm and 4am. Since Camp David, we are only allowed to fish from Erez to Rafah and there just aren't the fish in this little area for the seven hundred boats in the Strip. Another thing too — since the Aswan Dam was built, the Nile no longer floods. It used to bring lots of things down with it that the fish loved, but that's all stopped too. A lot of people are going out of business, or already have done.

A new onerous range of taxes were introduced by the Israelis. There is a 25% income tax, 15% VAT and then the additional 8% that we have to pay to the municipality to maintain the fish market. That comes to 48%. Permits have to be obtained and they can be withheld if the authorities wish to use this as a lever against activists. While Israeli fishermen are free to fish the whole coast from the border with Lebanon to the border at Rafah, we must not cross the 1967 Erez border.

Once when I was at sea with the nets down, an Israeli Patrol boat appeared from nowhere shouting at us with loudspeakers. When they got near enough, they turned high power hoses on us, cut our nets from the ship and threatened to sink us. They also fired shots over

our heads. They claimed that we were trespassing, but according to my calculations, we weren't. They attached a rope and pulled us back to the shore at Asdud and my boat was impounded for five months. During this time, it was left out in the sun, so when I got it back, the timbers were in a terrible state. I was also heavily fined and my fishing licence was withdrawn. We complained to the military but we had no luck. He just accepted the word of the patrol against ours and that was that.

In 1973, we formed a fishermen's co-operative. It aimed originally to represent the fishermen at the time when the Israelis were giving out the fishing licences. Now its work has been extended. It owns a refrigerator with a twenty ton capacity which makes it possible for some of the better fish such as bass, bream and golden goatfish to be stored and then sold at the optimum time. It also sells fishing equipment to its 350 members at cost price — nets and so on which can be imported at bulk prices.

The biggest scheme was to build a harbour with a jetty long enough for ships to unload directly on to it. At the moment, the ships are pulled ashore and launched by old tractors. The smaller ones are pulled in by hand, running them across sleepers on the sand. The UN offered to fund the project but it never got off the ground. The Israelis managed to stall long enough for it to be dropped. It's hard to run a fishing industry when you don't have a port of some kind.

The Israelis tried very hard to destroy our co-operative last year. Tax officials came and told us that we owed them sixty million shekels in tax and there's no way we can pay that amount of money. They want us to collect the tax from all our members and pay it to them in a lump sum. This came to a head when a merchant came to collect fifty tons of fish that he had ordered from us. The Israelis demanded that he should pay the tax before he could take the fish, so he backed out of the deal. The customs officials and army arrived and closed off the beach. We had to tip all the fish into the sea because it was going off. We've taken a lawyer from inside[3] to help us, but it's a hard case.

We now face direct competition from Israeli fishermen and it is hard to compete when they get so many loans and subsidies. The result is a very sad one. More and more of our young men are going to work as crew members on Israeli boats — or just as labourers wherever there is work. More of our boats fall into disrepair because the fishermen's

income covers basics — food for the family, that sort of thing — and few people have the cash for overhauls and modernising. It's another skill being taken away from us. It's the only skill I know and I am too old to go and be a labourer now. I'll just carry on and see what I can make of things.

Every morning at four, thousands of workers gather in the centre of Gaza to make the long journey to their places of work inside Israel. Yussef, an intelligent nineteen-year-old from Jabalia camp, wanted to go to university after finishing school. He had the grades but not the money, so like many others his only choice was to join the army of Gazans working as day-labourers in Israel.

Most days I get up at 4.30, get dressed and washed and leave my house in the camp before 5.00. Sometimes I have breakfast in the house but usually I take a piece of bread with me to eat in the taxi on the way to work. Yesterday I overslept so I was in a real hurry. I grabbed my things and ran to the taxi stop. While I was running there were three soldiers on foot patrol, and they called me over and asked me why I was running. That was about 5.00 a.m. I told them that I was in a hurry and had to get to Shujaiya by 5.30 or else I'd miss my work. One of the soldiers took my I.D. card and made me wait until 6.00 by which time I had no chance of getting to work. I don't know why they did it — just for fun I suppose. Usually anyway, at 4.45 I take a taxi from the camp to the taxi station at Shujaiya, and from there I take another taxi to Beershea. I get there sometime between 6.00 and 6.15 and then I have to wait for the Israeli boss to come and pick us up. He doesn't come until 6.30 but I know if we workers aren't there he won't wait one minute for us. He drives us from Beersheva to our workplace about 30 minutes outside the town and then we change into our work clothes and begin work at 7.00. We finish work at 3.30 and have a rest period from 10.00 to 10.30 which we aren't paid for. I think everywhere you get 30 minutes or an hour paid rest except in Israel. Even when we finish the work we have to do early, we have to go and see the boss and say, "I'm finished" because if he catches you not working it's a big problem. We're paid $7 daily, I mean the Palestinian workers. There are some Israeli workers working with us but they get $14-21 daily even though I can honestly say that all of us Palestinians

do as much work as two or three of them. We speak a lot about this amongst ourselves. I often say to the other workers from Gaza that we aren't being paid enough and that we shouldn't come to work, but you know that because our economic conditions are so bad there is no worker who could stay a long time without working. I spoke to the boss about the work conditions, but all he said was, "This is the work I have. If you don't like it you can eat shit." The problem is that we have no unions to protect our interests as Palestinian workers. There are some unions in Gaza but they're just about powerless in Gaza, never mind in Israel. No Israeli would ever recognise a Palestinian union or even listen to what a Palestinian worker has to say. I think it may be legal to have a union in Israel, but with nothing to back you up, the Israelis will just laugh at you. I mean it would be illegal for us to call for a strike, and if we can't call for a strike we can't defend ourselves because we have no bargaining power.

Relations with the Israeli workers are usually very bad. When I first began working with them I tried to speak to them about politics, you know, our situation as Palestinian refugees, but after a few days I knew that I was just wasting my time. I remember talking to one on my first day, about politics, and all he could say was that all the land of Palestine belonged to the Israelis and that we Palestinians didn't know anything and should be thrown into the sea! That was on my first day. Now we only ever talk about work when we have to, but still they're always trying to give us orders and tell us what to do. We don't allow them to give us orders, they aren't the bosses after all, so we have very little contact apart from trivial things like, "Pass the paintbrush". When they make tea or coffee they never offer us any, and we do the same with them. The boss makes things worse by treating the Palestinian and Israeli workers differently. For example, whenever it rains, the Israeli workers put down their tools and go inside to shelter, but we are always made to continue with our work even if it's pouring down.

Not all the Israelis I've worked with have been bad though. Once I worked in a house in Tel Aviv for a man who called himself a Palestinian Jew and we were very good friends. He liked the Palestinians a lot and was very good to me. Sometimes I used to sleep overnight in his house and his wife used to make food for me everyday. Every night I slept there we spent the whole time talking politics. He didn't want any Zionist state in the Middle East, and always called the country

Point of entry to Gaza town, military patrol passes under welcome sign. *Tordai*

Miri farming near Deir el Balah. *Tordai*

'Security road' Jabalia camp. *Paul Cossali*

Fishermen, Khan Younis. *Paul Cossali*

Palestinian workers leaving Gaza for work in Israel, 5.00 a.m., part of a daily exodus of 30,000. *Paul Cossali*

Israeli settlement of Neve Dekalim, near Khan Younis, intended as a replacement for Yammit, abandoned by the Israelis following the handing back of Sinai to Egypt. *Tordai*

Agricultural land between Khan Younis and Rafah. Site of proposed Israeli tourist centre. *Paul Cossali*

Palestinian woman from Rafah-Palestine greets relatives in Rafah-Egypt. Rafah was cut in two as a result of the camp David accords (1983). *Tordai*

Palestine. He lived in Palestine before the creation of Israel and he said that things were much better then than they are now. He used to live in Jaffa among Palestinian Muslim families and he told me that he had very good relationships and friendships with his neighbours. I didn't have any problems with him at all. When I finished work for him he paid me straight away, and as any Gazan worker will tell you, it's only rarely that you find someone like that. Usually when I finish my work in Israel it's a big battle to get my wages, but this man was completely different. We still keep in touch — I visit him, he doesn't come here, and I value his friendship.

Of course the relationship among the Gazan workers is very good because we are doing the same work under the same miserable conditions. Sometimes we argue about politics but it's never anything serious. At 3.30 we finish, get washed and changed, drive to Beershea with the boss, take a taxi to Gaza and then another one to Jabalia camp. I get back at about 5.30 or 6.00, completely exhausted. It's a big headache for me to spend about four hours a day sitting in a taxi. Every day the price goes up and our wages are never in line with the inflation rate. We asked the boss to find us a place to sleep where we work so that we wouldn't have to spend all these hours in the taxi, but he refused and told us that he couldn't find anywhere for us to sleep and it wasn't crucial for us because he was paying us enough to cover our taxi fares. What a liar! It's illegal for Palestinians from Gaza to stay the night in Israel. The only way we can stay legally is if we get special permission, and this has to be obtained by the boss at work. He has to go to the relevant Government Ministry and sign a piece of paper saying that all the workers who want to stay the night are well behaved and that he doesn't suspect them of being involved in any kind of political activity. He also has to tell the Government where exactly the workers will be sleeping. Even if he does get permission, the workers aren't allowed to be out on the streets after 8.30. If we're caught walking the streets after 8.30 it'll mean trouble, permission or not. Of course many workers sleep in Israel without permission because they can't afford to spend what little money they get on transport. I had one friend who was caught sleeping illegally in Tel Aviv and he was put in prison for forty-eight hours and had to pay a fine equivalent to three days work. And don't think he spent the time in prison just sitting. All the time he was beaten by what they call the Border Police. They're Israel's

specialists in beating Arabs they find in Israeli cities. I think the Israelis don't want us in Israel at night for two reasons. Firstly because they say that maybe we'll do things in the night; they're afraid we'll plant bombs or something, and secondly, the real reason I think, because they don't want Palestinians to have any contact with Israelis. You know if I or another worker sleep at a place in Tel Aviv of Haifa, we're sure to meet some Israelis when we're not working and maybe we'll start talking to them and for sure the government doesn't want this to happen. Because if I spend time with Israelis I'll tell them about my situation, and you can bet that this will be the exact opposite of what they've heard from their government propaganda. So maybe they'll start questioning what their government tells them. They don't want the people to know what the situation of Palestinians is like. They just want people to think that Palestinians are terrorists and not human beings. You know once an Israeli child asked me, 'Do you Arabs eat food like we do?' He actually thought that we didn't eat food.

When I go back to the camp in the evening I wash, rest and then have something to eat. Most days I go out for an hour or so to visit my friends, and I go to bed between 11.00 and 12.00. Somehow I can't go to bed early even if I have to get up early.

I think all Gazans who work in Israel suffer a lot. It affects them both physically and emotionally. I'm luckier than most perhaps because I don't have a wife and children to support. Those workers who have families are the ones who suffer most, especially psychologically. For instance, if a man is the only breadwinner in his family, he'll be under a lot of pressure to work every spare hour in order to get enough food to feed his children. It changes his personality. If he spends twelve hours or more away from his house he comes back very tired. He's miserable because of the long hours he works and the terrible conditions under which he works, so he begins to neglect his wife and children. He doesn't have time to play with his children because he hardly ever sees them. Usually when he goes out to work in the morning they're asleep, and by the time he comes back in the evening they're ready for bed. Sometimes he'll hit his wife maybe, not because he hates her, but because he's tired and frustrated and the smallest things can make him act irrationally. So there is a big possibility that tensions among the different family members will increase for the sole reason of his work. His wife will also be affected of course. She doesn't see her

husband all day and she has to get up at 4.00 when he gets up to prepare some things for him. She'll have to spend all the day looking after the children herself, cleaning and buying all the necessary things. She'll also have to meet and entertain the guests who come. She'll have to fulfil all these roles at the same time, and sometimes it'll be impossible for her. The young workers are vulnerable in a different way. Some children from here in the camp don't finish school but are sent to work in Israel when they're 12 or 13. Usually they sleep the night there and they end up learning all the bad habits of the Israelis, because they're at a very impressionable age and they lose contact with their own families. Some of the older workers as well, those people who work in the hotels, bars and discotheques, adopt the ways of Israeli society. They start to drink alcohol, smoke hashish and go and watch sex films, but I think such people are a very small minority. For example I can tell you the names of 100 people I know who work in Israel and I don't think that one of them is involved in such things.

One indicator of the growing proletarianisation of Gazan society is the increasing number of graduates who are being forced onto the Israeli labour market because of the lack of opportunities for them in the Occupied Territories and the new restrictions being imposed on Palestinians wanting to find work in Jordan, Saudi Arabia and the Gulf. Hassan, a twenty-four year-old:

I went to Germany in 1977 to study engineering. I would have preferred to study in Palestine but at that time there were no engineering faculties in the West Bank universities and it's forbidden for us to study in Israeli universities, so I had no choice but to go abroad. I'm not from a wealthy family but my parents were very keen for me to get a university education so they scraped and saved as much as they could for me and I was lucky to have an uncle in Jordan who made up what my family in Gaza couldn't raise. I came back from Germany in 1982 with a degree in electrical engineering and a lot of high hopes for the future. I specialised in medical equipment so I applied for jobs to the different hospitals in Gaza. I didn't have any luck but I wasn't completely disheartened because I felt there was a good chance of a job in the West Bank. I wrote off to hospitals and the universities there, but again there were no vacancies.

For six months I sat at home feeling depressed, hoping that something would turn up. I earned a little money helping a friend with car repairs, but in the end I had to find a job in Israel because my family needed the income. I've had a number of different jobs there, but now I'm working as a dishwasher in a Tel Aviv restaurant.

The worst thing about this for me is that I can't see any light at the end of the tunnel. Sometimes I think to myself, "You're going to be doing this for the rest of your life, getting up at 4.00, working like a slave all day, and coming back exhausted at night with not even enough to live on." The prospect really frightens me. And my family were so proud of their son studying in Germany and sacrificed so much. For what?

Responsibility for education in Gaza is divided between UNRWA and the Israelis. Refugee children attend UNRWA-run elementary and preparatory schools and non-refugees and all secondary school students go to Government, i.e. Israeli-run schools. Both sectors follow the Egyptian syllabus, but it is generally accepted that the standard of education in UNRWA schools is higher than in the Government system.

The Israelis are doing just what the British did: using the provision of services as a way of consolidating their control. Abu Ali, an UNRWA educationalist, describes the effect occupation policy has had on education in Gaza.

The invasion and occupation of 1967 seriously disrupted education. Many schools were targets of Israeli looting and all kinds of things were carried off to help furnish soldiers, houses in Tel Aviv and Jerusalem — desks, books, even laboratory equipment. Teaching didn't get started again until the end of 1967 and when the schools did open, the situation was really chaotic because there weren't enough teachers to go round. Some of them had left with the Egyptians when the war started and many had been either detained or deported by the Israelis. The only thing that we could do was to amalgamate the classes and try to muddle through as best we could. It wasn't easy, believe me. Inevitably I suppose, the schools became centres of resistance to the occupation. Political leaflets were always circulating amongst the students and on some occasions the fedayeen would enter the schools and try and

organise strikes. Whenever a teacher was arrested the pupils of that school would demonstrate and this of course would draw in the army. I remember one time the soldiers entered Zahra Girls School after a disturbance and severely beat many of the students. This kind of thing was especially common in Beach and Jabalia camps where the resistance, and the repression, were greatest. Sometimes the soldiers would deliberately try and provoke the school students, like now, by hanging round outside the schools and insulting Arabs and Palestinians. Sooner or later someone would throw a stone and that provided the excuse for more detentions and beatings. This level of tension continued until the early seventies and naturally, it had a very bad effect on educational standards.

Of course the Israelis were very anxious to see the situation normalised and the schools quiet because they were sensitive to allegations that they didn't have the situation under control. They began interfering in the schools as soon as they opened, laying down the law and showing who was boss. Very early on they summoned the government headmasters and gave them a sharp lecture on maintaining discipline and the punishments which would follow if they didn't. Many individual teachers were also called for interrogation by the military governor and subjected to warnings and threats to make them knuckle under. Israeli inspectors were constantly visiting the schools without any notice being given. I remember on one occasion an inspector discovered from a teacher's lesson plan that he was going to give a lesson on Palestinian history. The teacher was dismissed immediately. UNRWA wasn't under the direct supervision of the Israelis like the government schools, but still they tried to extend their control over us. They tried to appoint supervisors to our schools. When we had meetings with them to define the limits of our autonomy we'd often come to an agreement only to discover later that they'd tightened up the regulations unilaterally. Our teachers were detained as well, but soldiers came into UNRWA schools less frequently than the government ones, not because they respected our status, but because most of the problems and demonstrations were concentrated on secondary schools which are all government run. Gradually though, the links between the UNRWA and government schools were established and developed into the situation we have now, where the subject supervisors from both systems sit together to allocate subjects

UNRWA is disliked by the Israelis because it divides the people of Gaza into refugees and non-refugees, so the Israelis use the government education system to blur this division. The status refugee is very uncomfortable for Zionists. What they did was to build all their new government schools next to the camps and in the Israeli-sponsored refugee resettlement projects. Their aim was to get the refugee kids to go to the government schools because they were near to their homes. After the first year there was a drift back to the UNRWA schools because the standard of education was so much better there. Preparatory school teachers must have a university degree and one year of training or two years of training plus two years of teaching experience in their specialist subject. In government schools they prefer you to have no qualification. That's not quite fair, because they usually take the graduates of their teacher training institutes, but there are still many appointments of people with no qualifications at all. I remember in one year the government promoted twenty of its employees from doormen to teachers. All the applicants for government jobs must go for an interview and if they pass this stage, their names are sent to internal security for political screening. It would be impossible nowadays for an ex-prisoner, or even someone with known nationalist politics to be appointed to a job in a government school. I had a nephew who applied for a government teaching job. He was approved by the educationalists but rejected by the internal security. What kind of educational system is this? Often you know politics are used as a bargaining point in appointments, as a way of getting people the Israelis can control into the services; the old story of "If you work with us, well then, it might be easier for you . . . "

UNRWA has a policy of not employing non-refugees unless they can't find a refugee with the necessary qualifications which is increasingly rare now. I have to say that I don't agree with this policy because we have some citizens in Gaza, in Shujaiya for example, who lost their farm lands after 1948 and whose living conditions now are worse than those of people in the camps.

The Israelis meddled with the Egyptian syllabus by introducing Hebrew into government preparatory schools in 1969. In UNRWA we were opposed to Hebrew lessons from the beginning — all of us were united on this. If pupils wish to study Hebrew in their own time that's their business, but to make it compulsory in schools, never. Every

textbook which is used in the schools must be censored, even maths and physics books. This is first done by UNESCO, and then by the government. There is a special censorship committee of mainly Arab Jews who go over every sentence and cross out anything which could possibly be interpreted as anti-Israeli or pro-Arab nationalist. Really, these people are fanatics, even the foreign ministry people are more lenient than they are. Usually it takes six or seven months for a book to go through the process of censorship, and the second print of any textbook must also be subjected to the censor and go through the same laborious process even if the first print had been accepted and no changes had been made to the second. The books which are censored go to poor quality publishers here in Gaza who reprint them with the offending passages omitted. They're then sold to the students — all of which is illegal in international law, but what else can we do? Many books are censored for really trivial reasons. In one book for example, there was a story of an Egyptian soldier who took some sand from the Sinai to his home in Cairo. This was banned by the Israelis because it showed an Arab's love for his land. The textbooks used for the Egyptian syllabus are full of irrelevant information and detail. In the 3rd preparatory class we have a book on nutrition. When a friend of mine saw it, he said he was sure there was no doctor who knew all the information in that book. Within these confines, it's difficult to build critical thinking among our students, and even if we do, the student will be destroyed in the government secondary cycle. Just look at what happens with English. Most students leave the UNRWA 3rd preparatory with a fairly good knowledge of English, but when they finish government secondary schools you can be sure that they understand less than when they went in! We have a development centre in UNRWA for the enrichment and development of material, but we're always frustrated by the fact that we have no power to change the syllabus, this is in the hands of the Egyptians. We'd like to concentrate more on individual students, but it's impossible to do that when you have forty-five or more students in the class. And then there are the constant interruptions to the syllabus as a result of the shifting alliances in the Arab world; for example, all the syllabus was changed when the Egyptian/Libyan union was announced, and then changed again when the union failed to work out. Political manoeuvring always comes before education and schools are seen primarily as bases for social control.

There's no interest in concepts, ideas, just in filling people's heads with as much information as possible, information which so quickly becomes redundant. What we need is an educational system that encourages independent thinking, but both the Israelis and the Egyptians are against this. What we need is a revolution in education.

The drop out rate after the ninth year is about 6-7%, and growing because there is a lack of motivation amongst the school kids, especially since the Egyptian universities were closed to Gazans after Camp David. The government's attitude, its deliberate policy of neglect, has led to a situation where it's difficult to sustain any kind of enthusiasm. Not surprisingly, the morale among teachers and pupils alike is low. Salaries are poor and teachers don't feel involved or that they can change and develop the system. Teachers used to be respected in Gaza, but now, because the quality of the teachers has gone down, things have changed.

Corporal punishment is technically forbidden in Gazan schools, but I think it is fairly widespread. Teachers justify using the stick by saying that the kids are beaten at home if they misbehave and they say it's the only way of controlling a class which is large, and where the pupils have little interest in what they're learning. You know there is a saying here, 'The teacher's cane is a gift from heaven'. Personally, I think that corporal punishment is wrong, the easy way out, but what can you do when there's no planning, no interest and no facilities? Facilities in all the schools are bad, but in the government ones especially. In the science labs so many chemicals are forbidden because the Israelis say that the students will manufacture bombs, that the students never get to experiment — the best they can hope for is a demonstration by the teacher. It's just what the Israelis want. The schools to be open but not for real learning. There is a real sense of frustration which ends in people leaving teaching, and often the country. This is, of course, fulfilling the Israelis' ultimate aim.

Government teachers are forbidden to talk to journalists by the military authorities and we were unable to find one who was willing to be interviewed by us. We did manage to speak with Tessir, an ex-Government teacher, who lost his job because he refused to accept the constraints which both he and Abu Ali believe have resulted in the stagnation of Government education in Gaza.

I didn't have many ideas about work when I got back from studying in Egypt. I had some vague notion about being a translator, a writer or possibly a journalist, but the only job I could find in Gaza after a two month search was as an English teacher in a government school. I applied to work with UNWRA but they didn't accept me because I wasn't a refugee. In some ways I would have preferred to have worked with them because their supervisors are local people, people you know, and their salaries are good. My salary was lower than that of a doorman at an UNWRA school. I knew the government system was bad because I'd been through it myself a few years previously. I could see so clearly that the standards in education as well as the facilities and materials provided by the Department of Education were getting worse every year.

The books we used in the schools were assigned to us by the Department of Education, and we had to use them even if they were useless, which many of them were. The problem is that we follow the Egyptian syllabus, and the curriculum is designed by the Egyptians and not Gazans. Much of the material that's used in the schools is very old and hasn't been changed for years. There's no discussion on the way Gazans live, our social problems or anything that relates to our lives. During the Egyptian period, we had to learn about the history, geography and the economy of Egypt. Under the Israelis now, students don't study history — except ancient history, the Pharaohs and Romans, things like that. We draw maps of Africa, Europe or America, but most of our pupils don't know where the boundaries of the Strip are, never mind Palestine. They have eliminated the Palestine factor from education. Most of the social studies subjects have been removed from the curriculum. I thought that it must become a priority of ours to rely on our own resources rather than waiting for the government. In my first year teaching I suggested that we should work voluntarily after school hours to help the weaker students. Unfortunately the idea was rejected, not by the Department of Education, but by an official letter from the military administration to the headmaster. No reason was given except that there were security regulations and certain rules had to be followed. I have a good idea why those lessons were banned. Firstly they wanted to prevent the idea of voluntary work in government schools spreading, and secondly, it's related, because the occupation is against people organising themselves in any way whatsoever. Every

class or course of study has to go through the Department of Education.

It was our duty to keep order in the school, not just order in the sense of keeping discipline, but preventing outsiders from coming into the school and preventing the students from expressing themselves when they had any days of national celebration. So, we had to be guards, porters and policemen as well as being teachers. There used to be parent-teacher associations. Nowadays, the only parental participation in the education process is when the military summon them and order them to stop their children demonstrating.

It wasn't easy to work within such a restrictive system. What I did was I regarded my class as a community. We had discussions about how to study the material, what kind of activities we should do inside and outside the classroom and what places we could go and visit. We even had elections. Most importantly though I taught them to know about themselves. The headmaster never liked me because of this. He tried to prevent me from getting involved in such activities by keeping me busy writing reports. You'd have thought he would have wanted to encourage me wouldn't you? But he was a man who'd been in his job for sixteen years and he just wanted to keep things as they were, he didn't want to rock the boat. It wasn't for educational reasons, but fear of the authorities and losing his job. He regarded the school as his personal domain and he didn't want any changes. At first the Israelis didn't try to pressure me personally, I just worked under the same restrictions as all the other government teachers. Later though, they transferred myself and three other teachers to different schools because we had developed an energy in the school. We always discussed what to do and how to do it and the headmaster didn't like that at all. We were moved to maintain the status quo. Then I got a place to do an MA abroad, so I applied for a year's leave. There were so many forms to fill in and signatures to get. In the end, I only needed the signature of one more Israeli officer, but he wasn't available because he was away fighting in the war in Lebanon. So I left the country without the signature. It cost me my job. When I came back to Gaza a year later, I was told that I couldn't work in any government school because I had broken the rules and regulations.

It's the same story in the field of health services — running down the budgets, crushing Palestinian initiatives and destroying morale. Jamal,

a young doctor from Khan Yunis:

In Gaza we have three different layers of health service — UNRWA's, the government's, and some private provisions. UNRWA have a good service with clinics in all the camps and more importantly, some kind of health education. They produce posters and hold talks about cleanliness, diet and so on, but it's an impossible task when you look at the conditions in the camps. How can you talk about the importance of washing hands when the camps have open sewers and a plague of rats pouring over the uncollected rubbish heaps which litter the camps? An American development agency put forward a proposal to install sewers in Rafah camp — a move which would have had a serious impact on the infant mortality rate which I think is at least seven times higher than it is in Israel. The Israelis refused them permission to do so and this was quite clearly a political decision. They want to see the camps disappear and severely constrain any kind of infrastructural development. I think UNRWA do a good job in an impossible situation. They have quite a bit of independence really. Then there's the government network — a series of clinics catering for the non-refugee population and a hospital service. The hospitals especially are hopelessly understaffed and underfunded. With my own eyes, I've seen two patients in a bed, I've seen dozens of patients who become infected after operations because conditions are so unhygienic. I've seen patients who are mentally ill being treated with surgery for self-inflicted wounds, then sent home because the hospital had no provision for psychiatry. One particular case I remember was of a man who had swallowed a razor blade. There is only one psychiatrist in the whole Strip and he is hopelessly overworked and has only a twenty-bed wing for mentally ill patients. I could count Gaza's total number of ambulances on one hand — totally inadequate. But the money supply is controlled by the military governor. What can we do to oppose him? Although the budget has gone up in absolute terms, it has consistently fallen in real terms over the past six years. There is a bit of private medical care — a hospital and a few clinics which are generally pretty good but don't really make an enormous impact on the overall situation.

A few years ago, the Israelis introduced a health insurance scheme. Everyone over eighteen pays a flat-rate contribution. It sounds like a good system, except that not even all the money collected within this

system is spent in Gaza. And a lot of people just can't afford the monthly amount so they have to pay about $100 per night if they are admitted to hospital. I know plenty of cases where people who aren't insured just haven't gone to hospital when they're ill. What kind of health system is that?

But the most alarming development since 1967 in the field of health is the way the Israelis have extended their control over this aspect of our lives and smothered any attempts to challenge their control. It's not just in the supply of drugs and equipment, the appointments and the budget: it's more insidious than that. They have deliberately frozen the health services and even run them down to increase our dependency on the Israelis. I'll give you some examples. The hospitals in Gaza lack many specializations, particularly in chest surgery and paediatrics. We have plenty of skilled personnel, some work abroad, some are underemployed in the system here, and some even work as labourers in Israel. So why can't they get jobs here? Because those with the power have no interest in employing them. They will not give permission for the Red Crescent Society to build a hospital even though there is money, plans and everything ready. The reason they give is that the health service must be centrally planned and that having a splintered service would not serve the interests of the patients. This is sound sense — in a situation where the government is working for the people and is accountable. But in the context of occupation, central planning is just a disguise for control. I'll give you another example of what I mean. A friend of mine who is a doctor in Jabalia tried to set up a small clinic, offering his services free of charge. They quickly put an end to that. Voluntary work threatens them. Also the Arab Medical Association here in Gaza drew up a scheme for systematic health education whereby a doctor would be allocated a couple of schools and would go and give regular talks on preventative medicine — again on a strictly voluntary basis. This plan, too, was crushed by the military.

While our specialists are running around working in Israeli factories or operating on Saudis, a third of our entire budget for health is being paid back into the Israeli health system. All the operations which can't be done here get transferred to Israeli hospitals and the money comes out of our budget. Do they think they are the only ones who can do difficult operations? I've seen it in their reports — a picture of a grateful Beduin smiling up at the Israeli doctor who's just done the operation.

It makes me so furious but what can we do about it? They have created this dependence.

The Israelis are very clever with their statistics. I've seen reports that they send to the UN and the World Health Organisation, showing how benevolent their occupation is — full of tables and figures about all sorts of things. It's a favourite trick of all occupiers — comparing standards with how they were before they came. Gaza may well have more cars, radios and dialysis machines than in the fifties, but isn't this also true of every country in the world? They never talk about the quality of life. If they want to make comparisons, they should make them with their own country. I can tell you we have half the number of hospital beds per thousand population compared to Israel. But the most important factors are planning and funding. Both of these lie on the desks of army people whose primary responsibility to their government is to maintain order here.

The bulk of the literature in the Occupied Territories is based round the theme of resistance — in its broadest sense. Just as political institutions in Gaza are destroyed and repressed, Palestinian cultural expression is a target for destruction because the two are inseparable. G.A., a writer from Beach Camp:

In Israeli law, anyone who wants to publish a book must send it to a publishing house, who in turn must send it to the censor, who may cut it or ban it altogether. There is no appeal against this decision because it is made by the military authorities. So publishers are faced with a choice: either publish material which is allowed, which probably won't serve the cause very well, or publish material which they think is good and risk being closed down altogether. Two publishers in Gaza have been arrested in the last two years and we don't have that many publishers! Sometimes books are even confiscated after they have been cleared by the authorities. It's the same with the newspapers. Every article has to be submitted to the censor before being printed. That's why our papers are so bland and tame.

Most of our publishing houses are concentrated in east Jerusalem which comes under Israeli law. They are able to benefit from the less stringent Israeli civil laws on publishing, but the authorities still manage to get round this problem by banning the sale or possession of certain

books outside the municipal boundaries of Jerusalem. There are two publishing houses in Acco and we try to use them to publish books that we know would be banned in the territories occupied since 1967. Usually it is not the writer who is arrested. Here the law actually protects us. It is the crime of the publisher, not of the writer. I was summoned after one of my books was published and the officer told me that my book constituted incitement. What's this to do with me? You have to take the censor to court, because they allowed the publishing house to publish the book. That's what I said to him anyway, even though I knew the book had been nowhere near the censor. The whole process took about six months for them to check up on by which time the book had sold all the copies it was ever going to sell. The rest were confiscated. Most of the writers in the occupied territories have been harassed by the authorities at some stage. I have been arrested. My crime was being a writer. Secondly, no-one actually makes any money out of writing. Most of us lose money! This is a strange characteristic of Palestinian literature: from Nazareth to Gaza there is no completely free writer. Most of us have other jobs and so we fit in our writing whenever we can. After I finish my teaching, I go to my shop. Then I come home and spend some time with my family, then I do some reading, then I write if I have the energy left. But there is nothing like the thought that people will read what you write and be stimulated by it to spur you on. That's true of writers all across the world.

The number of people who read books is limited. The political reality saps people's energy — everyone follows the TV and radio news very closely. Most books are too expensive for people to afford and the possibility of self-education for most people is seen as either a luxury or a burden. The positive side is that these are all outside factors — there are no chosen reasons for reading less. Also, there is the fear of soldiers coming to your house and finding banned books which will result in a heavy fine. So, many people have turned to reading religious books — a factor in the spread of religious feeling here in Gaza.

Cultural repression is not confined to the harassment of writers; creative initiatives of all kinds are stifled. Moussa, an actor in his early twenties from Jabalia camp:

I was like most young people at school who are hopeful for success, not just for its own sake, but in order to be able to make an effective contribution to society too. In my Tawjihi, I was unlucky: my final percentage was just under what the universities in the occupied territories will accept. My parents couldn't afford to send me abroad.

Since I was a kid, I've always liked acting and imitating people. I tried to get a group of friends at school together to make up a small theatre troupe, but the teachers were dead against it. It just showed how strong their fear of the authorities was: they knew it could cause problems so they didn't want anything to do with it. Their hands were tied by the occupation, without the authorities actually doing anything. After this disappointment, I got to know a theatre group called "Free Youth", and what attracted me most was that the name seemed to suggest that we could express ourselves freely. I began to read any books I could get hold of about theatre. Two months after joining, I had a small role in a play called "Life in our schools". It was all about the problems we face from the occupation and how it affects the quality of our education. After this performance I was appointed leader of the group because the others could see my ambition and energy. At this time, the schools were preparing for the visit of a theatre group from inside, Beit el Carmel. It was an annual thing. I thought we should oppose the visit: it was sponsored by the Israeli trade union Histadrut, and I thought it was ridiculous that this group should come all this way to perform to us. I felt it was our duty to show them what our life was like here — in all its reality. We approached the authorities and after days of waiting and persevering, they offered us a script to perform, through the education department, which was a historical-religious story about Abraham. We reluctantly agreed to do it — it seemed so far from our everyday reality — just to get going and actually perform in front of our own people. After all the rehearsals, we were refused permission to perform in the schools and the Carmel troupe was brought in to do exactly the same play. We had to perform the play in another place to try and recoup some of the expenses incurred in the production. Even though it didn't touch on the social and political problems we face, it was well attended.

I left the troupe after this and set up a new one in Jabalia camp and got the permission of UNRWA to use their Youth Activities Centre in the camp. Our first play was called "The Guild of the Paupers".

It was a political statement lasting 3½ hours, yet no-one in the audience got bored, because it reflected our reality and people are hungry for this kind of theatre. When I was preparing for the next day, new restrictions were imposed by the authorities on the club and its use. It was made pretty clear that if we carried on, the centre would be closed. I didn't want to jeopardise all the other activities in the centre, so I left. We became involved with the cultural activities of the Red Crescent, but soon after this the building was burned down by fanatics. With the ever-tightening restrictions imposed by the authorities, the Red Crescent hasn't been able to get going again. There aren't any other places to do theatre work — no halls, no theatres, nothing really. Even when we performed in the Youth Activities Centre, we had to use their boxing ring as a stage! But we have proof that people want theatre that explores their lives. The aim of our work is not entertainment, but to spread awareness among our people who live in a world which is isolated from others. I want my work to reach the hearts of people who will taste the sweetness of freedom after the bitterness of slavery, the oppression of occupation and the emptiness of homelessness.

Notes

1. Former Israeli appointed Mayor of Gaza.
2. The northernmost point of the Gaza Strip.
3. Israel.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESISTANCE

"I'm saying to the world, look, I am Palestinian and I want to take part in building a better world. But until I am seen, I am first and foremost a Palestinian."

This chapter looks at the forms of resistance to occupation that have been tried, assesses their successes and failures, and looks to possible alternatives.

Gaza suffers from a political paralysis. There are many reasons for this paralysis, the most important being the thorough nature of the occupation as we have seen in the preceding chapter. At the beginning of our stay in Gaza, occupation was usually portrayed as the only reason for the failure to build an effective opposition. But, as trust developed, it emerged that the lack of unity and a workable strategy, both within Gaza itself and among the Palestinian leadership as a whole, were seen as major causes of the current political impasse.

Much of the dissatisfaction and occasional disillusion expressed in the current leadership outside Palestine (ie: the PLO, which is usually referred to in the interviews as the "outside leadership") centres on the widespread belief that money is being sent into Gaza in an irresponsible way. Specifically, this refers to the money given by the Arab countries to the Joint Jordanian Palestinian Fund (known as the Joint Fund) which was set up following the Baghdad Summit in 1978.

The Israelis have always tried to interpret criticism of the PLO as a call for a more moderate (ie, more compromising) leadership. The opposite is true. The majority of Gazans we spoke to are calling for a more radical, more decisive and more open leadership.

The destruction of the military resistance and the embryonic political movement between 1967 and 1972 was a watershed. Since then, the nationalists have been unable to build effective organisations; largely, but

not solely, due to the effectiveness of the occupation. The Muslim Brotherhood have emerged on the backs of this failure. They offer a clear strategy and hardline purist approach which has proved appealing to many people. They are liberally funded from abroad and have a solid political base in the Islamic University.

Gazans, like all Palestinians, feel betrayed by the outside world — both by the West, which created and maintains Israel at the expense of the Palestinians, and the Arab Gulf countries, who appear unwilling to bring their enormous economic power to bear to enforce a just solution. We shall be meeting students who went to study in Turkey and Britain and who talk about the attitudes of their host country towards Palestine. UNRWA too, whose funding mainly comes from the West, is also discussed.

Having considered the current Palestinian leadership and the international dimension, we then asked about forms of opposition which have been tried. The first, in the period 1967-71, was a fierce military resistance which is remembered with great pride. But beneath the pride, there is a realisation that as a strategy it was flawed because the objective conditions worked against it and it tended to preclude the emergence of an organised grassroots political opposition. We will be meeting men and women who were involved in the military struggle as well as those who tried to build a political base alongside it.

Political opposition has been severely curtailed by the occupation. The United National Front, a coalition of political groups from the Egyptian period, was systematically destroyed by arrests and deportations which it could not survive. It was left to the Red Crescent Society, the three professional associations of doctors, lawyers and engineers, and to some extent the municipal council, to provide a political leadership although this was a role that they didn't necessarily seek. Unlike the West Bank where there were municipal elections in 1976, there has been no elected mayor in Gaza since the British mandate. The municipality has no real power because it lacks a legitimacy that only elections could provide. Elections in the professional associations may provide a litmus test of the political climate but their authority does not even extend in any real way over their own members. As we saw in the previous chapter, regulations imposed by the Israelis have effectively emasculated these societies.

This inability to build an effective political opposition has meant that much of the current opposition to occupation is on an individual or

spontaneous basis. A school student of seventeen describes a demonstration in Jabalia and Nabila, the women's activist from Jabalia whom we met in Chapter Two, describes her involvement in a strike while inside Ramla prison. Imad, who was jailed for nine years in the early seventies, describes how prisoners survive and develop politically while in jail and why prisons are known as Palestinian universities.

There are, however, some signs that the lessons of the sixties and seventies have been heeded and that a grassroots movement is slowly being constructed. Women's work committees and voluntary work committees are emerging in the camps. Their priority is social and political education and the avoidance of direct confrontation because the response to it would be so predictable. They represent the first real attempt to organise from the bottom and to provide a sense of involvement and value to many people, especially women, who have previously felt excluded from the political stage.

There is also a serious attempt now, among progressive elements, to cut away the rhetoric, shake off the despondency and strive to develop a radical new strategy which requires mass participation, which would in turn result in mass participation. In many ways, this is a painful and delicate process: painful while searching for a fresh strategy that implies the redundancy of the current one and delicate when it challenges the previous assumptions that formulation of strategy is the domain of the outside leadership or that any good can come from negotiations whilst the Palestinians remain in a position of weakness.

This fresh strategy is primarily the initiative of the left. It is the basis of a new energy which grows in strength as the direction of the traditional leadership appears to be making little headway. It includes a belief that social issues must be tackled as a prerequisite to liberation and that the revolution has been corrupted by money which has filtered down from the top. It rejects the military option as being ineffective and even counter-productive in the current conditions. It appreciates, somewhat tentatively, that links with certain Israeli groups could be beneficial. But above all, it asserts that mass action, rather than the manoeuvrings of the leadership, however dextrous, hold the key to the future.

There is a considerable amount of criticism within Gaza of the traditional rightist leadership and the role the outside leadership plays in maintaining it. Amal, a women's activist who spoke at length in Chapter Two, is passionately opposed to that section of the leadership which in her view does not understand what it means to be progressive:

Back in 1970, I was invited by one of the big families in Gaza to go and eat with them. There was such a beautiful table: flowers, ten different dishes, everything perfect. When I said I wanted to wash my hands, I passed through the kitchen and there I saw some women from the camp, working. When I went back to the table, I started asking if they needed so many servants and how much they were paid — the usual questions, you know. I found out that they weren't paid very much, but they could take home the food that was left over for their families. When I questioned my hosts further, they said, "but times are hard and we can't afford any more. Anyway, UNRWA gives them rice and cooking oil." That was our traditional leadership.

As for those who now call themselves progressives, there are two reasons, I think, why they have not provided the leadership. In the first place, what matters for them is status, and secondly they are progressives politically only, not socially, and that's very important. You see, to be progressive politically, you're nobody really, because they don't have the courage to be progressive socially. To be progressive, you must be so from the minute you wake up till you go to bed: I mean socialise with people progressively. Treat your children at home progressively. Treat your woman, if you're a man, at home progressively. Give her independence. Help her, teach her to be independent. I know somebody who married his daughter to a very, very rich family when she was seventeen, and when I asked him why, he said: "Well, haven't I secured her future?" That's what's important for him. He considers himself progressive, he's a leader of the progressives. If you're progressive and you have principles, you wouldn't go to Egypt to beg Mubarak to accept your son in an Egyptian university if you disagree with his politics. That's what I mean, to live progressively. The people who sit together and drink their vodka, the men together, and talk about Moscow, what do their women do? Talk about fashion. They don't socialise progressively. I mean you wouldn't see them going visiting each other with their wives. It's very rare, only

on special occasions, and when they do, they separate. The women walk into one room and the men walk into another. Progressive politics is about how you treat the people you live with.

This problem of disunity is a delicate one because it is not only the Israelis who have a vested interest in a divided Gaza. This makes the lack of a unified opposition to occupation even more painful. Abu Nimer is a leftist intellectual who has been at the forefront of Gaza's political leadership since the fifties. He is a man who chooses his words carefully and his dispassionate style of expression belies a striking clarity and power.

Trying to establish a strong nationalist leadership is a difficult process. The reality is an occupation which is able to crush any attempts to organise almost before they have started. But there is also a great deal of money which is being poured by Saudi Arabia into the hands of people here who are also fighting the Left. They are trying to buy people in every way — by providing jobs and work. Money makes a lot of difference and they have money. There is also a lot of talk about the question of money which is meant for people in the occupied territories and how it's being distributed. There's plenty of complaint about this — a cumulative process of discontent and I don't know how this discontent is going to be expressed.

You can't wage a struggle of any substance against occupation when there is this strong factionalism within the ranks of the people. The present struggle and impasse in the PLO is essentially a Left-Right struggle and what's happening in Gaza reflects this confrontation. It's not just the occupation which is preventing the emergence of a strong, unified leadership in Gaza: it's the occupation and the Right. Actually, the arm of the occupation in combating leftist elements in Gaza is the Palestinian Right, represented by the Muslim fundamentalists and people with vested interests in the area.

The whole question of the relation between the outside and the inside is still undefined. I mean, whether the local issues are to be decided locally or if the outside should have some say is not resolved. Certainly, in my opinion, it's one of the problems that has to be faced up to and tackled straight away.

I hope that the present conflict over unity will be settled and have a positive effect inside as well. It would be much easier for the inside

to express itself if there were unity outside. I think there's no doubt that all local issues pertaining to occupation should be dealt with locally and that these decisions should be respected by the outside — naturally, on the outside the Palestine National Council is the recognised authority, and the inside has to go along with the decisions of the PNC — it's obvious, straightforward. But any local matter — the struggle of the people against occupation — will have to be decided locally, not outside. The outside ought to cease interfering in any organisation on the local level. This can be achieved by discussing the issue in an objective and open-minded way. I hope that it's not beyond the ability of rational people to agree on things when they are discussed in a logical and scientific way.

These sentiments are echoed by Abu Ahmad. He too has been involved in political activity for more than thirty years, but he is bitter and disillusioned now. He describes himself as an armchair leftist.

For the Israelis, occupation is easy and in many ways we have facilitated this. Our opposition to occupation has always been within a framework which they can control. It's all so predictable — the Israelis have got it sewn up! They delineate the boundaries and we stick inside them. Look at the money coming in. The only people that the PLO can send money to are the people that the Israelis don't mind being bolstered from outside with this money. By and large, they are the people who least need any money. Hundreds of people are taking money and the Israelis know them all. No one can get money in for projects which the Israelis are against. If I was a leader, I wouldn't send any money in to Gaza except to families who have members in jail and suffer direct economic hardship as a result. The money at the moment either strengthens the conservative leadership or helps absolve Israel from its obligations. The municipality is currently spending one million dollars on a sewage system and the money has come from outside, yet this should be the government's responsibility. The trouble is that the Joint Fund was set up to help the people in the occupied territories, but in fact it's being used to further the political aims of the Right. It comes from Saudi Arabia and Jordan, passes through Fatah to their men and the rightists here. For there to be a revolution, everyone and everything must be incorporated, not just the leadership

outside. We need a fresh strategy and ideology that has a part for every single person to play.

Bassam, the economist and journalist whom we talked to about Gaza's economy in Chapter Three, believes, like Abu Ahmad, that sending money to Gaza is wasteful and even counterproductive.

It's no good just pouring in money and propping up enterprises which are basically dead anyway. Let me give you an example. A farmer goes to the Joint Fund in Amman and says, "Give me some money to set up a large-scale chicken farm in the Strip." He comes back with the money, everyone says congratulations, and he spends it all in Israel buying the equipment he needs. As soon as he's producing his eggs, the Israelis send in ten truck-loads of very cheap eggs, tell the traders to pay later or some other gimmick, and our friend goes bust within a year. Even if the Joint Fund gives him more money, it won't solve the basic problem. And it has happened so many times now — with soaps, plastics, medicines, meat-packing and quite a few other things too. There are worse examples of how Joint Fund money is mis-spent though. A man who owns an ice-cream factory came back from Amman with money to improve his factory. He bought the latest machines and laid off ninety percent of his workforce, and that was after the messenger had taken his share of the cash — probably half. Is this "steadfastness in the face of occupation"? Is it steadfastness to pour money into our Seven Up Bottling Company — an American drink put into Israeli cans using cheap Gazan labour — cans which then litter our streets by the thousand? Joint Fund money is being wasted on enterprises that can't succeed.

Abu Nimer again:

The lack of unity on the outside makes it very difficult to strive for unity on the inside. Our primary concern is to get a national coalition to work for national survival. I don't think this should be a Left concern only — I have no objection to the religious rightists being part of it even. It's only on this basis that we can have progress. I strongly oppose any attempt to escalate the conflict between Left and Right under occupation. We must look for the ground where Left and Right can

meet in beneficial co-operation for the general good. I haven't lost hope that the Right or some strong elements on the Right will come to realise this because in the final analysis, occupation is against everyone. It expropriates the Left and the Right. Some of them understand this and some of them don't. There are people in Gaza who link their future not only with the Right in Gaza but with Jordan and Egypt. These people draw benefits from the position they take towards other reactionary Arab countries. If they change position, they lose these benefits. Under the ultimate threat of being deported from here, they think it is better to keep good relations with the Right on the outside. To put it simply, the policy the Right is following here is not a local one: it is imposed from outside and they have to follow it. They are not free to decide what they want here. It is no good the Right saying they are fighting against communism. It is a meaningless phrase whose only purpose is to smear the Left in the minds of traditional people. We have to look at the political programmes of the different factions and try to find common ground.

Sharaf is a Muslim Brother, bearded and gentle. Unlike Majda, the Muslim Sister whom we met in Chapter Two, he expressed his views calmly and they seemed to be the result of considerable thought and reflection.

It would take a long time to explain the Islamic movement in Gaza fully, but I shall try. It initially began in Egypt in 1928. In 1948, many of the Brotherhood joined the struggle against the Zionists and they fought bravely. After the Egyptian revolution in 1952, Abdel Nasser tried to destroy the movement. He hanged two of the leaders, Abdel Qader Auda in 1963 and Sa'id Qutob in 1964, but the movement was never crushed. It didn't really grow in Gaza until the mid-seventies as people lost hope in the nationalist movement for which they had sacrificed so much and gained so little. It has grown despite hostility from the progressives and a clever tactic by the Israelis who have done their best to destroy us by letting us grow. They knew that doing this would sow the seeds of mistrust against us among the people and tarnish our good image.

One of the effects of occupation is a spiritual and moral corruption in Gaza. Beer and worse are now available and more widespread than

before. Our cinemas show sex films. Relationships in families are broken up by this degeneracy and obsession with material goods. Poor people. They try to snatch everything but they can't get what they want. They work in Israel from dawn till dusk and they still don't earn enough for the basics. Every effort goes into scraping enough money together to survive and they don't give their minds to Islam or fighting occupation. This stagnates any political movement. So many people say that the situation is so desperate that it is best not to talk about it, or even think about it. The sexual morals of Israel — the naked women, the alcohol and the hashish — have tempted our youth. Once they are addicted, they don't think of their brothers, but only of the next drink and how to pay for it. They want to show their friends at the bars and the card tables that they're big and they can afford prostitutes.

Lots of people ask where the Brotherhood gets its money from. Our enemies accuse us of taking it from the Zionists, the Americans or the imperialists. I don't blame the people for this, I just ask God to forgive them. The fact is that the Islamic movement is international. We receive money from this movement but we also get a lot of money from our members here to pay *zakat*![1] The money goes towards our mosques, kindergartens and clubs.

No movement appears out of thin air. The Islamic movement is secret and well organised right down to the last detail. I believe that in order to liberate your people, you mustn't just fight from the outside, but liberate your society from within. The battle is between the Jewish Israeli people and the Muslim Palestinians. We can't win if we are not organised on a mass level — we must recruit everybody. We must build a people who believe strongly in the word of God, and because of this, must fight against the Zionists who stole the land and the holy places. We don't want a state tomorrow if it is going to be full of drunks and hashish smokers who would be a burden to those who have to fight for their freedom. I must liberate the people from the degeneracy and the corruption. I want to build a new generation which is true to our religion. I don't want to be in prison while hundreds of dogs are running after my sisters. I want to sleep peacefully in prison, or even be buried in my grave, knowing that there are hundreds of fathers to look after my family. We must not repeat the tragedy of the seventies when hundreds of our youths died in senseless battles. When this movement

was destroyed, it left a terrible vacuum. See how many collaborators there are now and how much corruption. The Islamic movement is different. If someone dies, we know that there are hundreds to replace him and that the movement can never be destroyed. It will take a long time for our movement to grow and despite the criticism we get from the leftists, we consider them as our allies. We'll never be against our people. We understand that the leftists are sick people and we will help to cure them. They say that we are reactionary, that we corrupt the people and obstruct the struggle. They publish books which contain harsh jibes at us. They slur our name. But we are fighting the same enemy, so why don't they leave us alone? When we have liberated our land, then will be the time for these discussions. The PLO is full of divisions and factions. Why are there so many factions? Because people have different strategies and different ideas of how to achieve things. It's like two people with two carts — each carries the same goods to the same place but the routes may be different. I hope that God will guide people to realise that there is one aim and help them to see the true path. Zionism and occupation are the cause of all our divisions. We mustn't attack each other. Instead, we should inject all our hatred into fighting Zionism.

The trouble is that we have spent too long on the military struggle at the expense of the struggle for ideas. The people are spiritually empty and they need to become aware of Islam to fill this void which has been imposed by the occupiers. The Zionists have tried to destroy our culture and way of life. The PLO must consider this problem or they will lose their moral grip over the people. The youth don't care about the news, they only care about the cafes and hashish. We have to rebuild our people and the PLO must improve the economic situation rather than throwing money into the hands of the rich. They support the landowners and factory owners — the people who don't need it. The refugees are penniless and they stay that way, yet we are the ones who suffer most. We hear that money has been sent but it never arrives. Who steals it? The nationalists are going to lose a lot of support if they don't clamp down on this money problem.

As for the Israelis, I know that there is a progressive Israeli movement, some of whom are even opposed to Zionism. But we are against it because they occupied our land and took over our holy places. If they are really against Zionism, they should leave our land. It's a

mistake to think that there is a progressive movement. It is only struggling for itself — for withdrawal from Lebanon, for fewer settlements in the occupied territories. There are shades of Zionism, light and dark, but they are all Zionists. We believe the land of Palestine is Islamic and it is for the Muslims and not the Jews. We must liberate all the land and return it to its rightful owners. The constitution of this new state must be based on the Quran — the root of all constitutions. We oppose the idea of the nationalists controlling the military struggle. They dismiss us out of hand, but I am ready to fight for either victory or martyrdom. If the PLO wants the other movements to join them, they must adopt the Quran. Only the Islamic movement can fulfil our political, military and spiritual needs.

Abu Ahmad again, the "armchair leftist", is scathing in his criticism of Gaza's rightists and the Muslim Brotherhood.

The Left in Gaza is divided and on the retreat, overwhelmed by the Muslim Brotherhood and their allies. The three professional organisations and the Red Crescent used to be the stronghold of the Left but they have divided and squabbled over personal differences and prestigious chairs. So the fundamentalists have exploited this well; they are better organised and more unified. For example, in the elections at the Arab Medical Association in 1983 the fundamentalists stood as one list and got over fifty percent of the vote.

Basically Fatah is not a force here. There are plenty of Fatah supporters, but they have no leader and they are split between personal ambitions and the needs of the actual situation. The PFLP, although it has fewer members, has more power because it is better organised.

Shawwa doesn't always go along with the PLO line, but the PLO have to go along with him. He is really a very clever politician — he keeps his hand in with everyone. Look who he's got good relations with: Egypt, Jordan, Saudi — the King himself — and the American Embassy in Tel Aviv. Few people actually like his politics as you can never tell whether he's talking about politics or tactics. I don't think there is a difference for him. But the vast majority of people here are not questioning the legitimacy of the PLO to be our sole representatives. What we are questioning is the legitimacy of the current leadership, particularly of Fatah which is originally a Muslim

Brotherhood group: the top leaders are dominated by a religious element and the Central Committee has strong links with the Muslim Brotherhood. They pour money into their supporters and so conservative elements in Gaza see no contradiction between the Muslim Brotherhood and the PLO. Do you see what I mean? There are so many different factions all saying: "We support the PLO". The result is that the PLO has no clear-cut policy. There's total confusion — and there always will be while the PLO is trying to speak with so many voices. If you actually listen to the speeches of the Muslim Brotherhood over the loudspeakers from the mosques every Friday and before the daily sunset prayers, you will understand what their programme actually is. They shout about Afghanistan and communism, the denigration of women by communism, the breakdown of family life because of communism and even occupation because of communism. Where are the mentions of Palestine? Because Israelis are 'People of the Book' they honestly consider them to be better than the communists. This whole struggle between the Left and the Right can be seen at the Islamic University in Gaza. I have a friend there who tried to set up a union of teachers. The university administration, which is mainly made up of the old traditional families, called him in and tried to persuade him to take a job outside Gaza — at a good salary too. When this tactic failed, he was summoned by the military authorities who had a copy of his timetable on their desk. For "security reasons" he was told to report to the military headquarters daily at the exact time his lectures where timetabled.

They distribute leaflets condemning this and that. I'll give you an example. I saw a leaflet which criticised the English department at the university for giving its students T.S. Eliot — a decadent western poet they said. In his place they suggested that students should have to study books about Islam which had been translated from Arabic into English. They also run kindergartens where the children are taught to memorise the Quran sitting in rows, chanting. The rise of the Muslim Brotherhood is a new thing — within the last ten years. As I see it, their rise is a testament to the failure of the Left and the nationalists to put forward a viable strategy. People support them because they feel disillusioned and helpless. Many people fear them.

Isam is an UNRWA teacher who talks with passion. Within Rafah,

where he lives, he is considered a radical and a leftist — a description of which Isam is proud. He received his political education during a long prison sentence in the seventies. His understanding of Zionism is unusual and he is frustrated by those who still don't distinguish between Judaism and Zionism.

One of the issues that it is difficult to talk about is having links with Israelis. Until 1967 I had never seen an Israeli. The image I had of them was of a people with tails and that their country was a state run by separate gangs of criminals who had been brought in from all over the world. My father didn't believe this — he had lived with the Jews before 1948.

I was a schoolboy in 1967. I remember that I was buying the fruit in the market on the first day of the invasion. Everyone was talking about the possibility of war and there had been a lot of troop movements. We never thought we could lose. The Egyptian radio used to broadcast commentaries like, 'We are prepared for the drastic war, to restore the rights of the Palestinians and to save the Arab World from this parasite which is just a cancer in the Arab body.' Anyway, I was in the market that morning and I saw two Israeli tanks racing through the town. Even then I couldn't conceive of there being Israelis in these tanks. I thought they were Israeli tanks which had been captured by the Egyptians who were just taking up better positions further south! Later that day, Rafah fell. There were Israeli soldiers everywhere. I watched them, standing on a box, looking out of the kitchen window with tears streaming down my face. It wasn't so much that we had been so easily defeated but that we had been so easily tricked. It was an enormous shock and it led me to question everything that I had thought was unquestionable. Here we were, occupied by a people who clearly had every intention of staying. I read a lot — I wanted to know what kind of people they were, who supported them and why, what is Zionism, what are their strengths and weaknesses?

Understanding the difference between being Israeli, Jewish and Zionist is not an issue for many people. The soldiers who occupy us are Israeli, Jewish and Zionist.

The Israelis are very keen to blur the difference between Judaism and Zionism so that they can twist any opposition to their policies into an attack on them as Jews. I know that this is really for the consumption

of the West, but we Palestinians are also victims of it. When the Israeli soldiers walk through the camp, the kids shout "Jew, Jew" at them which only strengthens their idea that a lot of Palestinian opposition is just anti-semitism. Instead, we should be shouting "occupier, fascist" at them. By saying "Jew, Jew", we are blurring the distinction between Jew and Zionist. We are playing into their hands.

The other day, I read a report in the papers which was quoting President Numeiri of Sudan. He said he thought that the PLO should compromise and recognise Israel because, realistically, Israel was too strong for the PLO to destroy. It's the same lesson America and Europe are always trying to teach us, but it completely misses the point. Parts of Palestine have now been occupied by the Israelis for thirty-seven years and Numeiri still thinks it's about throwing the Israelis out. Does he think it has taken us this long to realise that the Zionists have a bigger army than us and more international support than we have? He's talking the language that might have made sense when the issue was Partition, back in 1947, but things have moved on since then. I've lived in this camp — I was born in this camp — what compromises can I make? Let's get this straight. We will talk to those who want to listen to us, but there will be absolutely no compromise with Zionism. The very nature of Zionism precludes compromise. We will live with those Jews who accept that the Palestinian refugees can return to their homeland and live together in a secular democratic state. I know quite a few Israelis now and I reckon a lot of them are victims of Zionism just as we are. I have an Iraqi friend, a Jew, who is an artist in Beershea. He knows what Zionism is about — the Jewish cafe near him in Baghdad was bombed by Zionist terrorists in the fifties to force them to go to Israel. He told me that it was the Iraqi communists who had saved the Jews from mob violence in 1948 after the establishment of the state of Israel. He never wanted to come here, but he was forced to because his whole family came.

You know, every year, I make the effort to go back to our village. It's only a few kilometres from the Strip. I like to take the children and show them where their grandfather was born. Last time I went back was a big shock because the landscape had changed so much in that year — new houses, trees cut down, a new access road — that it was hard to find where my father's house had been. After the visit, we stopped to drink a tea in Ashkelon. I got talking to the Israelis in

the café and I told them where I'd been that day. An Israeli woman from Algeria interrupted me and with misty eyes told me about the beautiful almond and fig groves she had left behind near Algiers. There we both were, in a café in Israel, dreaming of returning to our homes.

Lots of people here think that having a Palestinian state alongside an Israeli state would solve all our problems — you know, half each. I think this is not only unacceptable, but also unrealistic. If Gaza was independent tomorrow, I'd still be living in this camp. I'd still be as far away from my village as I am now. There will be no peace without justice and no justice without a return of the refugees. I'm looking for a one-state solution and I'll tell you why. The whole political reality has progressed beyond the two-state solution. We are already too intertwined whether we like it or not. Even if the Israelis had the political will to agree to an independent state in Gaza and the West Bank, they wouldn't be able to allow it to happen. We are now their second biggest market and a vital source of cheap labour and water. It's not about defence, religious nationalism or things like that: it's about economic survival. And how would they hold together all those different communities if there was no Palestinian people as a common and unifying enemy? To talk about a two-state solution is a red herring and unrealistic. We've wasted a lot of energy discussing it. I don't want to have two highly nationalistic and antagonistic states living alongside each other. I want to be part of a state which is progressive, secular and based on justice.

This is why I don't see much difference between the Likud and the Labour Party. When Shimon Peres became Prime Minister, a tiny number of people in Gaza did benefit. Funds were released or permission was granted for something or other. It works on a reward system. It makes me so angry because for the vast majority of us, there's no difference between Likud and Labour — Pepsi Cola, Coca Cola — or as others put it, Labour give you twenty-four hours to get out of your house before destroying it and Likud give you twenty-four minutes!

For Sayed, a worker from Bureij, the issue of potential links with certain Israelis isn't worth much consideration. His view if fairly typical.

I hear some people talking about the possibility of building a class

alliance between the Palestinian and the Oriental Jews. They say the Orientals are exploited like we are, and we share an Arab culture. I think these people are deluding themselves. When I was arrested, I was dragged out of my house by an Iraqi, tortured by a Moroccan and the biggest bastard of a prison warder was a Yemeni.

Nabila, a young activist from Jabalia who spoke about the position of women in Chapter Two, is one of the few Gazans who has political links with Israelis. For her, the decision of which Israelis to work with is an easy one.

Some say there should be no links with Israeli society at all. The level of political consciousness among people in the camps is such that they don't distinguish between Judaism and Zionism. It is the same with the Israelis: their political awareness is low too. They say that they think we are all members of Fatah. They say that we are just out to destroy them. I think they just don't want to understand. So it is difficult for Gazans to recognise that some progressive Israeli elements are not Zionist. But we have nothing in common with those Israeli progressives who are Zionists, like Peace Now. We have links with Israeli women through Women Against Occupation and the Democratic Movement for Israeli Women. On some things, we can work together. They support us on demonstrations and we are able to exploit their links with the Israeli press which is much less censored than ours to publicise our causes — for example a strike in a prison. We believe that our links with outside groups do give us some protection. We have received six delegations from Europe visiting the WWCs in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

I had very little contact with Israeli women in prison: we were political prisoners and kept apart from the others. There would be many new prisoners each day, but we had the opportunity to build up a rapport with only one or two. There was one girl who was in for killing an Israeli soldier — it was some sort of love tiff. She came in a confirmed Zionist but we managed to bring her round to supporting our cause. Before we can build any real relations with Israeli women, they must be anti-Zionist, but even then things can go wrong. Many cannot accept my previous involvement in military operations; that is the cut-off point in understanding between us and many Israeli women. I am not really

interested in a common struggle purely based on our being women. It must be based on anti-Zionism. Our struggle for the liberation of women and the Palestinian struggle are one. If Israeli women want to come and join us then they are welcome, as long as they are not Zionists. I have to say that the Democratic Women supported us a lot when we were in Ramla jail. While we were being gassed and tortured, it was good to feel that Israeli women outside were questioning Zionism. Their support was a politicising experience for them.

G.A, a writer from Beach Camp, looks to Ghassan Kanafani, a leading figure in the radical Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, as an example of a writer who always made the distinction between Jew and Zionist. Kanafani was assassinated by an Israeli hit squad in Beirut in 1972.

Too much Palestinian literature is about individual confrontation with oppression. I could write hundreds of stories about the Palestinian farmer as the good solid person and the Israeli soldier who is wicked. But if I always use this pattern, then it is on the same level as the lies they teach their children about us. I could picture our people and their love for their land and I could also picture the Israelis and their love of what they call their land and their cause. I could then picture their weaknesses — their militarism, their hatred for the Palestinians. We must always remember we are resisting Zionism and not the Jewish people. It's not a question of good against bad. We mustn't teach our kids that the Israelis are all bad and we are all good. There is no absolute goodness. I want to expose the contradictions within Israeli society, rather than portray it as all bad in a blanket way. They are a people and we suffer by pretending that they aren't.

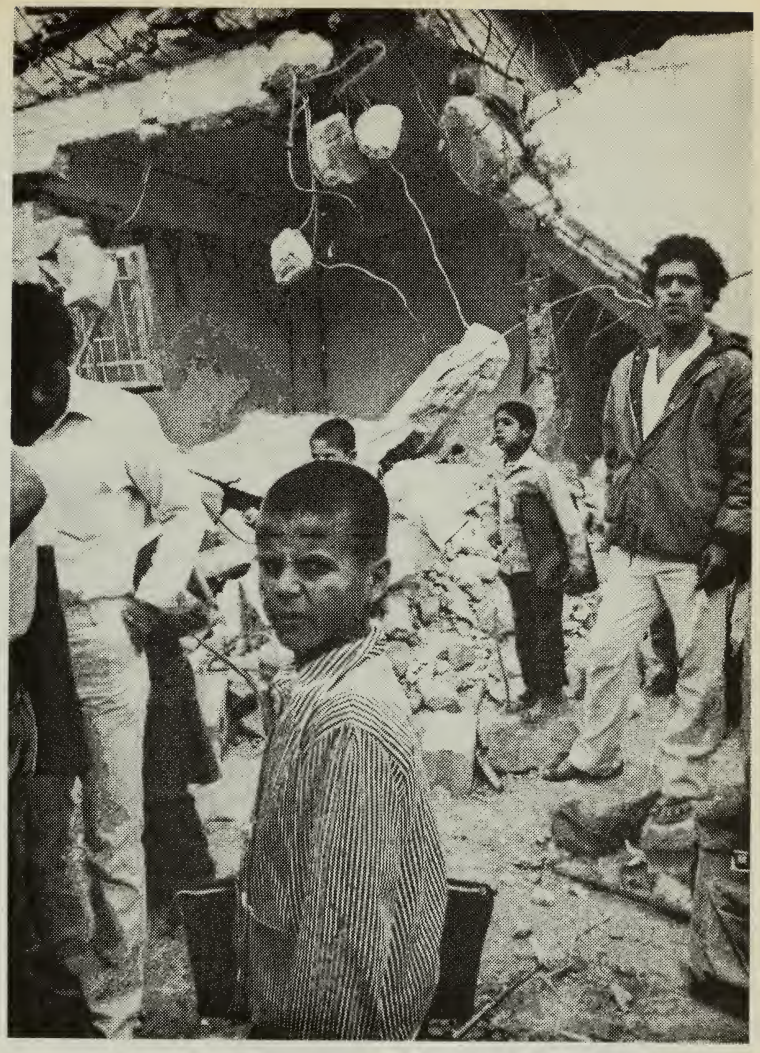
Ghassan Kanafani is one of our writers who have achieved international acclaim, for example for his story *Return to Haifa*. It's a story about a family who lost one of their sons during the emigration in 1948. The child is then found by a Jewish family who adopt him. He has committed no crime yet he is brought up to hate Palestinians and is imbued with the principles of Zionism from childhood. This raises the question of what defines our personality — our birth or our society.

As a Palestinian, I read this story and understood it on the political level. But for someone who knows nothing about the Palestinian cause,

the story would still have value on the sociological and psychological level. That is what made Kanafani such a well-known writer. His writings can be taken and appreciated on different levels. He showed the good characteristics of the Jews who took pity on him and took him in, and from this base, he goes on to criticise them for teaching the boy to hate. The irony of course is that he is taught to hate his own origin. It's ten years since this story was written and at the time it was revolutionary. Here was someone who could write about the good characteristics of a family of Jews. Remember at that time, some Arab nationalists were still saying that it was a struggle between Arabs and Jews. So many people are still saying this as if nothing has been learnt over the past forty years. Kanafani could say these things because he was accepted as a strong revolutionary thinker. He wasn't writing for the high class literary circles; he was writing for the fighters.

Although Fatah is the biggest faction within the PLO, we found it hard to find someone who would defend the Fatah strategy and Yasser Arafat's style of leadership. Omar, who lives in Khan Yunis, is a student at Bir Zeit University on the West Bank.

You are going to hear a lot of criticism of Fatah, I'm sure, especially at the moment when there are problems in the PLO. But you've got to look at who's causing these splits and you've got to realise that Fatah is not only the biggest faction in the PLO; we really are the PLO. When the PLO was set up in the Sixties, it was the puppet of Abdel Nasser. Fatah emerged to prove through its military operations that we have a cause and we want to be in charge of our own destinies. We didn't want the backing of all those conservative Arab states, especially after 1967 when their bankruptcy and impotence was revealed. Fatah was truly revolutionary in those days. We believed that victory in Palestine would be the catalyst for political change throughout the Middle East. Fatah's ultimate aim is the liberation of all Palestine and the establishment of a secular democratic state as is written in our covenant. But your ideas have got to follow reality and that's why we are talking about an independent state in the West Bank and Gaza, in confederation with Jordan. It's no good the Left saying Fatah have abandoned the struggle and that we are ready to recognise Israel. Israel is a reality that we confront every minute of our lives. The reality is



Home of Palestinian guerilla demolished by Israelis, following bus-hijacking, April 1984. Two of the four hijackers were killed during the storming of the bus, the other two were beaten to death during interrogation. *Paul Cossali*

Body searches by Israeli troops, Palestine square Gaza 1984. *Tordai*

Family with portraits of two imprisoned sons, one serving a five year sentence, the other, 25 years. Beach Camp 1984. *Tordai*

Family, Jabalia Camp 1984. *Tordai*

also that a political settlement is on the table and we believe this can be achieved through an international conference where all the parties concerned would be represented — including Israel, the PLO, the USA and the USSR. Israel won't make any concessions without pressure from the international community, especially America. That's why we believe the Reagan initiative has some positive elements. It doesn't answer all our national aims, but if all the Arab World stands together, we can force Reagan's hand. Basically the Gulf countries want stability. They'd like to see a Palestinian State created so that they can get rid of the Palestinians from their own countries.

At the moment, Syria is enemy number two after Israel. They tried to destroy the PLO after the evacuation from Beirut by using Abu Musa and the rebels to topple Arafat. They perpetrated massacres in the camps near Tripoli. We won't forget these things as we won't forget what they did in Lebanon in 1976.[2] Syria wants to destroy the PLO as an independent force which we have spent the last twenty years trying to establish. We know that Syria was behind certain factions boycotting the Palestine National Council in Amman this year. They violated the Aden agreement, they slandered Arafat personally, so we felt the best thing to do is to just go ahead. We are the largest faction, we have the full support of the majority of the people, Arafat is the symbol of the struggle. We are ready to welcome the other factions back, but they must accept democratically that Fatah is the most popular faction in the PLO.

I think a lot of time is wasted talking about preparing the people socially and politically for the struggle ahead. The first step is to get a state, however small, and its social attitudes will be determined by the majority of the people. Take women for example. Of course we'll pass legislation in our new state giving women equal rights. Anyway, at the moment, women are participating in all aspects of the struggle — demonstrations, women's committees, camp life and the military struggle. I'm happy with the role they are playing, especially raising kids. We need lots of babies because it strengthens us and poses a threat to the Zionist state.

We have also been accused of abandoning the military struggle. This is not true. We'll always stress the importance of military operations. We want to put pressure on the Israelis, to stretch them economically and politically and just to remind them that we are here. War is the

continuation of politics: we have to play every card we have and they should complement each other — diplomatic pressure, military attacks and political initiatives are all important.

A lot of people are criticising the way money comes in to Gaza from outside and accusing Fatah of all sorts of things. Well, firstly, the money is sent by the PLO from the Joint Fund, not from Fatah, and secondly, if there are any irregularities, then we have proper channels to go through and deal with these problems. The money is going to nationalist institutions all over the occupied territories irrespective of their politics. We don't pay the Village Leagues of course, but if Shawwa is the mayor of Gaza, then the PLO is going to want to support his municipality. A lot of the criticism about this is based on jealousy and greed.

It's difficult to feel optimistic about the future, but we have the determination and commitment to fight on. The justice of our cause will never disappear and that is what keeps us going. I really think that Fatah is no longer a liberation movement. We are fighting for something more fundamental — our very existence — and that reality has obliged us to rethink many things.

There is a strong and general feeling among all Palestinians that they are victims of an international plot. It's not just that the land has been stolen by foreigners and the people have been dispersed, but that the international community has sanctioned this. The West created and has maintained Israel, the Arab world has failed to use its power and the Eastern Bloc is viewed with suspicion because of its godlessness and its desire to avoid the kind of confrontation that would be needed to restore Palestinian rights. This sense of betrayal compounds Gaza's isolation. UNRWA is the most tangible contact with the outside world and its impotence to either restrain the Israelis or maintain its quality of service is a source of much bitterness.

Abu Iyad has been an employee of UNRWA for over twenty years, working as an administrator. He is aware of the limitations placed on UNRWA, but believes it is important to maintain the Agency. He reserves his criticism for the Arab regimes.

The existence of UNRWA is an embarassment to the Israelis. They hate that word "refugee" because people ask, "a refugee from where?"

They also hate seeing the UNRWA report being discussed in the UN and UNRWA's mandate being extended year by year. They are trying to see UNRWA's services run down by encouraging and forcing resettlement,[3] by denying UNRWA permission to extend or even repair their installations and by building government schools and clinics near the camps.

America is the biggest contributor to UNRWA and there are more Americans among its international staff than other nationalities. We among the UNRWA staff have very little control over policy which is usually decided by the offices in Vienna and New York — we just carry out their policy. Occasionally a Palestinian initiative is accepted but if the key people are against an idea, they can just say that there isn't the budget for it, and they control the budget. The Arab countries could of course solve the deficit problem very easily, but they don't have the political will to do so. Their principle is that the western countries are to blame for creating and maintaining Israel, so the West should bear the responsibility for those who were driven out. The western countries have repeatedly pressed the host countries to accept direct responsibility for the services that UNRWA now provides, but this has been constantly rejected. It is a conspiracy to avoid finding a real solution. If the Saudis did increase their contribution then the deficit would just be bigger next year until the western powers ended up paying nothing. Instead of asking why the Arab governments don't pay you should ask why the Americans don't pay. That is the key. The future is very bleak. It is very important to keep UNRWA as a buffer between us and the Israelis and it is important that UNRWA is paid for by the West otherwise it would be even more powerless. As it is, it's got few teeth. In 1972 the Israelis destroyed the houses in Bureij and Jabalia of some people who had been detained but not sentenced. They were destroying UNRWA property and breaking even their own rules. But what could UNRWA do? We've had so many UN decisions in our favour but nothing ever comes of it and this gives the Israelis confidence to do what they want. Most people could survive financially without the help of UNRWA yet the refugees cling to it. We will not leave the camps. The next move can only be back to Palestine. It is a question of life and death — survival on our land. I know some people say that UNRWA pacifies us — makes us less likely to resist. This isn't true — it wasn't UNRWA that created the idea of resistance —

they haven't been able to stop it, nor have they wanted to. The PLO had good relations with UNRWA — there is no conflict of interest. UNRWA provides services not leadership.

Amal disagrees with this idea.

UNRWA is giving us morphine injections; its creation was a conspiracy of reactionary right-wing governments. If we had been left alone, we would never have accepted being uprooted. But we were pacified by the meagre two kilos of oil, two kilos of rice and the blankets which all the world had used before us. They have made beggars out of us.

Abu Iyad again:

Part of this feeling of betrayal by the outside world is a result of the inability of the Arab world to use its potential strength to oblige the West to restrain Israel and impose a settlement on the area. There is a strong feeling that the Arab armies who entered Palestine in 1948 actually had no intention of defeating Israel but rather aimed to put up a token fight and then retreat because they were still under the control of the imperial powers — particularly England — who could not tolerate such a defeat after the horrors of European fascism were revealed.

In Gaza, as you know, we have had a traditional link with Egypt, but this link was never as strong as the West Bank's link with Jordan. We were never annexed by Egypt and the thrust of political activity between 1948 and 1967 here was to achieve as much independence from Cairo as we could get. I don't think there is anyone in Gaza who would like to be annexed by Egypt now, and I'm sure this is quite mutual. The Camp David Accords came as a great shock to us. The Sadat regime signalled in a dramatic way that it considered getting back a demilitarised Sinai more important than using its strength to help retrieve Palestinian rights. So, while many people in Gaza have graduated from Egyptian universities or visit Cairo for holidays, we are realistic about the role Egypt has chosen and its implications for us. While Egypt remains within the framework of Camp David, we cannot expect any useful support in our search for self-determination.

Nor can we expect anything from Jordan. How short our memory is sometimes. It's only fourteen years since King Hussein ordered the massacre of thousands and thousands of Palestinians. He has his aims — expansion of his land and influence — and I don't think the Palestinians will gain anything from his intentions. I'm sure he doesn't want to see a strong and truly independent Palestinian state between Jordan and the Mediterranean. We in Gaza really have no links with him except through former Mayor Shawwa who is prepared to work as the King's man here. Hussein is never going to help us to return. Only Syria, of the front line states, has maintained a confrontationist stance towards Israel — at great cost to itself. I don't have much faith in the democratic nature of the Syrian government, but I do feel that they alone have acted rather than just spoken. But surrounded by the impotence of Lebanon and the capitulation of Jordan and Egypt, there is nothing much that they can do in isolation. This is why Egypt's independent agreement at Camp David was such a disaster to our cause.

The Gulf countries clearly have no interest in bringing about a solution. They don't want to upset their allies in the West and they certainly don't want to put their investments at risk. They like it as it is: they get the skilled Palestinian workforce who can't find work at home and they can manipulate the threat that Israel poses to maintain their régime and repress their own people. They are only interested in building their little empires with money — the poor get nothing because they aren't worth buying. We don't need their money. Where were they during the 88 days of suffering in Beirut? But their money gets results. Many of our newspapers and journalists are eager to keep in with the Jordanians while there is all this talk about confederation. They write that they've done surveys in the Occupied Territories that show 99% of the people in favour. Rubbish! The papers are just trying to win a few more dinars.

Something which strikes any foreigner who visits the occupied territories is the passion with which Palestinians argue their cause. This reflects a widespread belief among Palestinians that the international community is to blame for their suffering and that it can play an important role in rectifying it. Mustafa, a student, describes his experience, while studying abroad, of the outside world's attitude to Palestine. He studied engineering

in Turkey.

My problems were more to do with living in a foreign country. It doesn't matter if it's in the East or the West. As a new student I stayed for two months in a Youth Hostel in Ankara. After that I moved to a house and I lived in different houses the whole five years. We had to keep moving because there were some problems — we were foreigners and unmarried. The landlords in Turkey are pretty down on foreign students. In the university itself, we got caught up in the battles between Right and Left before the coup. You see, the Turkish leftist students supported the Palestinians and so we were assumed to be supporting them. This brought us a lot of harassment from the Right. I remember one Palestinian student with a beard; the rightists attacked him and made him shave it off. Palestinian students usually lived in the same houses and often they'd attack our houses at night and throw stones through the windows. If a whole group came they'd break in, beat the people up and hurl abuse at them just for being Palestinian. Generally I think the Turks are hostile to Arabs because of the Ottomans. Also they think that they are creating a western style society and reject the East as backward. Sometimes the police would stop you in the street and ask you for your passport. As soon as they saw you were Palestinian their whole attitude changed: they'd become abusive. Sometimes they'd start beating you in the street. I was arrested one night because I happened to be out walking in the streets late, it was about midnight actually. It's not forbidden to go walking, but they took me in. They held me for two days before they let me go. There was no charge — they just subjected me to abuse. It was to frighten me.

Between 1967 and 1971, there was fierce military resistance in Gaza, especially in the camps. Abu Karim, who served a long prison sentence for his part in this struggle, describes the resistance. He now runs a shop in Gaza town where he lives since moving out of Beach Camp three years ago.

The military resistance to occupation started in about November 1967. After the June defeat and the rapid withdrawal of Egyptian troops,

the remaining members of the Palestinian Liberation Army didn't have much choice but to fight for their own survival — they certainly knew they wouldn't be treated as prisoners of war. Weapons weren't a problem at first because the PLA had access to large quantities of arms hidden by the Egyptians in the orange groves. Later on, these were supplemented by arms brought in by sea in small boats or across the Sinai by camel. The Beduin were in charge of the desert route because they knew the terrain so well; at the beginning they were even taking arms out of Gaza and replacing them with more modern ones.

Recruitment was mainly directed from outside. People who had left in 1948 and 1967 would recommend individuals that they knew, usually family members, and they would be contacted by couriers who came from Jordan. The new recruit would be assigned a role and given the name of the other person to contact for weapons. It was then their responsibility to recruit others.

Most of the fedayeen come from the camps where the narrow alleyways and densely-packed houses gave them the shelter and support they needed to operate. For a time in the late 1960's the fedayeen were holding their own against the Israelis. This was and still is a source of great pride for Gazans especially when you remember that the armed struggle never really got off the ground in the West Bank. You often hear people say that during those years the Israelis may have controlled the Strip during the day but the fedayeen ruled at night. Maybe this is a romantic exaggeration, but I am sure it was true of the bigger camps, especially Jabalia. We were attacking the military almost daily, ambushing their soldiers, bombing their vehicles — making them pay a high price for occupation. You never saw then what you see now — soldiers lounging around the squares or driving about in open-sided vehicles. We only ever saw armoured cars, and believe me, whenever you met a soldier on foot patrol in Gaza, you could read the fear in his eyes.

Nabila, again, describes her involvement in the military struggle — an involvement which cost her two prison sentences.

Jabalia was called Liberation or Vietnam Camp because we put up such tough resistance. I was young when the armed struggle started so my first role was to participate in demonstrations and mobilise my

classmates. Whenever there was a curfew, I made sure that all the kids in my area were out on the streets causing problems for the soldiers, shouting slogans and throwing stones. When I was older, I became one of a group of women who supplied the fedayeen with food, weapons and medical aid. We also helped to organise support for the families of martyrs and prisoners.

It wasn't easy being a woman and an activist in those days because as well as sharing in the resistance, we were continually struggling against the social restrictions imposed on us as women. Some parents would try and force their daughters to stay at home — a few families even considered it a disgrace when their daughters were arrested. They didn't seem to take any pride in the fact that their daughters had devoted themselves to the struggle to liberate Palestine — they were only worried that the people might think that they couldn't control their daughters!

Sometimes being a woman was an advantage. One day I was carrying supplies to a group of fedayeen hiding in the citrus grove near the camp when I was stopped by an army patrol. They asked me what I was doing and I said that I was just out for a stroll. Their commander wanted to search me but I told him that as a Muslim woman I could never let a man search me. To show that I had nothing to hide, I suggested that they bring a female soldier because I felt confident that there weren't any nearby. In the end, they had to let go.

I moved from support work to military action. In 1972, when I was about twenty, I was shot and lost my right arm in a grenade attack on a military position. Straight after they captured me, they took me to show me off to the other soldiers — parading me like an exhibit. A woman commando was something different. I was very badly injured and bleeding heavily, but it was four hours before they took me to the hospital. They started their interrogation straight away while I was still bleeding and continued during my treatment, first at Shiffa Hospital in Gaza and then at Tel Hashomer near Tel Aviv. After sixteen days there, I was taken to the military jail in Gaza but I wasn't fully recovered by any means. Gaza's central jail is well known to be the worst jail in the whole area. I stayed nine months there waiting for my trial. I got seven years plus ten years suspended and a heavy fine. My family's house in the camp was demolished and my mother, father and aunt were arrested too.

Abu Nimer again:

It is true that the collective imagination of Gazans was captured by the armed struggle of the late sixties, but even so, I think that most people were realistic about the potential of military resistance. Let's say they saw it more as a clear and tangible demonstration of rejection of occupation and a struggle for their rights rather than a road to guaranteed liberation. We always knew it was an unequal struggle and I don't think that many were surprised that the military resistance was crushed within five years of its starting. The balance of forces, the geography of the Strip and the brutal measures the occupation took against the people all contributed towards this defeat, but there were other factors involved. The occupation came at a time when the people were leaderless and disorganised and this made all forms of resistance difficult. For me it is the Egyptians who are to blame for this because they had consistently suppressed Palestinian initiatives during their administration. Secondly, in my opinion, the leadership of the PLO and the different military factions taking part in the resistance neglected the task of properly organising politically before becoming involved in the armed struggle. For example, the military resistance didn't have a unified organisation. There may have been reasonable co-ordination within the different factions — Fatah, the PFLP, the PLA and the Popular Liberation Front — but between them there clearly wasn't. I think for guerrilla movements operating under the conditions we faced in Gaza, discipline and preparedness are crucial, and it is my opinion that both of these were lacking.

Organisation within the military resistance was often poor. Abu Muhammad, now a nurse, recalls some of the shortcomings.

The organisation of cells in Gaza was supposed to be on the traditional triangle system, so as to minimise what people knew and could potentially give away. It didn't work out that way because we all knew too much, too many names. Many times I saw young fighters strutting around the camp with their Kalashnikovs and their faces uncovered so that any collaborators knew who they were. It was crazy.

After I was recruited I went to meet my contact in his house and there I was introduced quite openly to the whole cell. Three months

later, two of them were arrested and I knew it was only a matter of time before the soldiers came for me — most of the fighters were caught because of information extracted from their comrades under torture. Thirty-three days after their arrest, I woke up with soldiers standing over my bed. When I said goodbye to my family, I knew I wouldn't be seeing them for a while. In the wing of the prison where I was held, there were about thirty people and I knew every one of them and which organisation they were in except for three.

Ali, a politically active leftist during the height of the military resistance, was deeply involved in underground work at that time and was strongly critical of the failure of the military leaders to understand the importance of building a political base.

There were attempts at political organisation right after the occupation, especially among the leftist elements. They started by trying to start a broad political front, a coalition of people from the groups active during the Egyptian period — the Palestine Communist Party, the Ba'athists and the Arab National Movement. This became the United National Front (UNF), an underground organisation to confront the occupation. At that time, the Israelis were attempting to force a mass emigration. They were inflicting all kinds of hardships on the people, ensuring that there were no employment opportunities and at the same time offering families financial incentives to leave. Inevitably, some people couldn't take any more and wanted to get out of Gaza, which was like a big prison. So it was our immediate priority in the UNF to persuade people not to leave by explaining how emigration would be a disaster for Palestine. We distributed leaflets against emigration, visited people who were thinking of leaving, wrote slogans on the walls and so on. Of course our activities were illegal, so we were organised in cells of three or four people. There were about four hundred UNF cells throughout the Gaza Strip. I was able to travel to Ramallah on the pretext of visiting relatives and while I was there, I spoke to families who were thinking of taking money from the Israelis and were on their way to Jordan. Usually I managed to convince them to change their minds.

In Gaza, my impression was that people were opposed to the military resistance because they knew it wouldn't achieve anything for them.

We'd just witnessed the decimation of the Arab armies by Israel, so what possible hope could we have of being liberated by a few hundred fedayeen? The objective conditions in Gaza simply didn't favour an armed struggle. The fedayeen like to cite the experience of Algeria and Vietnam, to prove the viability of what they were doing, but it was a false analogy. In Vietnam and Algeria, the guerrillas could hide themselves in the jungle and mountains: in Gaza, all we've got is a few orange groves, and the nearest thing we've got to a mountain is a sixty-metre hill above Shujaiya! Most of the fedayeen were military people without a high level of political consciousness. For example, they had a policy of entering the high schools and preventing the students from taking their exams. I was underground at the time and opposed this idea, so I sent a letter to the leader of the Popular Liberation Front explaining to him that education was important to us as Gazans and Palestinians. The reply I got was, "the only education I'm interested in is the education that produces the sound of gunfire and explosions all over the country". That was Ziad Al Husni who later committed suicide in Rashad Shawwa's house.

Unfortunately, the outside leadership was encouraging the military people here. I say unfortunately because it was becoming clear to many of us that the armed struggle was counter-productive. It was giving the Israelis the opportunity to turn the screw on the general population even more. Instead of getting rid of the occupation, it was strengthening it.

The Left tried to build links between the UNF and the military resistance. We wanted to convince them to consider us as their political wing. We would provide them with safe houses, get weapons when we could and carry out political organisation among the people. The military people agreed to co-operate, but at that time in 1970, they had been considerably weakened. King Hussein's expulsion of the Palestinian resistance from Jordan was a severe blow to the fedayeen here because it was the operational headquarters and the centre for arms supplies. Also, many of the fighters in Gaza had either been killed in combat or jailed. Anyway, nothing came of the alliance because most of the UNF activists were uncovered and thrown in jail. I was put in prison for twenty-six months and by the time I came out, Sharon had bulldozed security roads through the camps, depriving the fedayeen of their shelter, and Dayan had very cleverly opened up Israel's

factories to Gazan workers, creating our depedence on Israel. That was the end of the military resistance in Gaza.

Samir, a young activist from Beach Camp, feels no romantic nostalgia for the armed struggle. His dispassionate analysis of military resistance on the grounds of practicality is one with which many would agree but that few would actually put forward.

To have a successful revolution, the only criterion you should use on what form of struggle to adopt is whether it corresponds to the reality of the situation that you find yourself in. That's why I am critical of people who blindly assert that resistance in today's Gaza has to be based on the armed struggle. Just look at the problems involved. I don't know how many weapons there are in Gaza now, but I don't think many. How could I get more in? The coast is guarded by a fleet of patrol boats and a string of military posts from Erez in the north to Rafah in the south. The beach is under a dusk-till-dawn curfew. The land borders with Lebanon, Jordan and Egypt are all mined, electric-fenced and heavily guarded. You may as well give up before you try: smuggling weapons into Gaza is like smuggling weapons into a prison.

After 1967, we had a military resistance well supplied with arms and yet it still failed. Why? We have to learn and develop from that experience because the factors operating against the armed struggle then are still working against us now. Actually things are worse now. The camps have been thinned and the Israelis have a more efficient network of collaborators than they did then.

Another weakness of the military resistance in the sixties was its failure to do the political groundwork before the armed struggle was launched. That groundwork still has to be done and surely that has got to be our priority. Without an organised population and a strong leadership, any form of resistance under this occupation is going to be tokenistic and meaningless. To start an armed struggle now would not only be a dismal failure, it would set back the development of popular organisations. The Israelis would welcome it as an opportunity to deport activists and raze the camps. That's what happened in the sixties and early seventies. Why keep pinning our hopes on military options when that's the Israelis' strongest point? Some people say if we killed a few soldiers each week in Gaza, the Israelis would pull out,

but I hold the view that it's the military threat that strengthens the Zionist state. They're psychologically as well as militarily adapted to contain it. Shouldn't we be looking for the weak points and contradictions in Israeli society and be trying to exploit them instead? That's the revolutionary way, not this bankrupt rhetoric and gun worship. We can't avoid the responsibility of critically assessing our situation and acting accordingly. Look, I'm not so naive as to believe that Zionism can be defeated without violence. We all know that it's got to come to that eventually. What I'm saying is that the time is not right now. We have got a lot of organising to do first.

On the West Bank, the political leadership has centred on the elected mayors of the towns and cities. This has not been the case in Gaza because there have been no elections for the mayorship since the British Mandate. However, Rashad Shawwa, head of Gaza's richest family, was appointed mayor for two periods in the seventies. Gazans see him as being pro-Jordanian which limits his legitimacy in the eyes of many people. Abu Nimer again:

In June 1969, the Israelis became angry with the UNF's activities so they banished myself and some others to the Sinai. Those who remained in Gaza continued with their work, but it was obvious that the Israelis were going to crush any attempt to form a coherent, capable organisation. When we came back from the Sinai, they banished another group of activists from the UNF and when they came back, the Israelis banished me to Lebanon. By the time I returned from exile, the UNF had been dismantled and the political atmosphere generally was grim. There was talk of political solutions — the Jordanian scheme, the United Hashemite scheme — but it was only talk.

In 1972, the Israelis dismissed the municipal council and there were different ideas about how to respond to this. The Israelis wanted to appoint Shawwa as mayor and he agreed, but many of us were opposed in principle to the appointment of a mayor by the Israelis. Shawwa argued that the municipality is a popular organisation and should be manned by a local person. This is true, but I rejected what it would mean in practice. If you come to confrontation with the Israelis straight away and you leave your post, maybe this is acceptable as it represents another demonstration of rejection of occupation. But we were afraid

that if Shawwa was interested in hanging on to his post he would be placing himself in a position where he'd have to accommodate himself gradually to the Israelis. That's why we objected — because we felt that not compromising principles was more important than having a local mayor. A mayor under occupation is supposed to respond to national interests and not only look to municipal duties, and because of this, popular elections are so important. Look at the mayors in the West Bank. When the Israelis made the venture of holding elections there, the mayors who were elected realised that being elected placed a special emphasis on how they should conduct themselves. This pushed them into a position of complete confrontation with the Israelis who had held the elections in the first place because they wanted to dismiss the mayors who were in office. They hoped that through elections, they would get people who would co-operate with them. In the eyes of the Israelis, there was no need to have elections in Gaza, because they had a mayor with whom they could work. Anyway, Shawwa worked as mayor for two years, until the Israelis came to make such impossible demands on him that he resigned. When he did resign, he said that that was that, but he was appointed again in 1975 when Shimon Peres was defence minister. I got into a fierce argument with Shawwa over this. After the first experience, he ought to have learned his lesson and not stepped into the same trap again. Under such circumstances, the municipality didn't appear as a body of leadership to the people.

With the underground political and military leadership crushed and the municipality disrespected, there is little opportunity for political or even social and cultural organisation. The Red Crescent Society is primarily a medical society with clinics and dispensaries throughout the Strip (see Chapter Three), but it has also become the stronghold of the Left. The story of its destruction as a political forum is a sorry one. It reveals that the rightists in Gaza are even prepared to seek the assistance of the Israelis to destroy the Left. Abu Nimer again:

During the 1970s, the people began to look towards the Red Crescent Society for leadership, although we didn't ask to be looked on as leaders and we weren't involved in politics as such. What we did was to try to counter the harassing effects of the occupation and try to strengthen

the morale of the people by propagating everything that is positive in Palestinian tradition and achievement. We held all kinds of cultural activities which were very well received as were the elections to the RCS which were the first to be held in the Gaza Strip. This practice of democracy and the open way in which we held meetings of the executive and the plenary won us a lot of support and respect and led the people to look on the RCS as the leading nationalist institution in Gaza.

Of course this angered the Israelis who were anxious to scuttle any attempt to solidify any organisation that was opposed to occupation. They were relentless in their attempt to discredit and smear the image of the RCS. They made it their task whenever they called anyone for interrogation — and tens of people were and still are being called every day — to bring up involvement with the RCS. They used to say that the RCS was a communist institution and it's better to stay away from it. They did this daily. More than once I spoke openly to the *Shin Bet*, "Why do you attack us and try to discredit us?" They would deny it saying they talked to people about the RCS like they talk to people about everything that goes on. But sometimes they really said what they meant. Once an officer said to me "because you are nationalist" while he told others "because the RCS is communist".

I'm very sorry to say it, but the RCS was also annoying to other people — those people who are against democracy and popular organised involvement. The Islamic fundamentalists were part of this movement, but they were just on the surface, the tip of the iceberg. The biggest part were other factions. The opposition to the RCS demonstrated itself most clearly during the last election campaign in 1979 when there was an organised move to get rid of the group who were on the executive committee. Very strangely and suddenly, the fundamentalists and a certain individual who was alleged to be the Fatah representative in Gaza, became very involved in the elections. I wanted to avoid the damage of a nationalist split so I tried to reach an understanding with him about a coalition and having a single electoral list which could be agreed on by all factions. He refused, and demanded thirteen out of the twenty-one seats for his faction. This was of course unacceptable. We had an open election and the Left faction ended up winning eighteen of the seats. It was a major setback for those who were backed by the fundamentalists and the municipality

headed by Shawwa. Amazingly, one of them responded by calling in the Israeli Ministry of the Interior to uncover alleged ballot rigging. The Interior Department didn't find any conclusive evidence but took an unusually active interest in looking at all our reports and archives. Later we invited him to explain why he had taken his allegations to the Israelis and not raised it internally. He couldn't give a satisfactory answer, so we dismissed him completely from the RCS. The whole episode confirmed in our minds the rumours that the Israelis' backing for these rightists amounted to a deliberate collaboration to defeat the Left. Unfortunately, that's what's happening in Gaza now. It's not just the occupation that's preventing the emergence of a strong unified leadership in Gaza, it's occupation and the Right represented by the fundamentalists and the people with vested interests in the area. Their ever-existing slogan is the fight against communism. It never wears thin, this slogan. They used to say that the RCS had a special colour — red. This slogan was the slogan which the colonialists had used for decades against nationalist elements in the area. It's the same slogan used by the Israelis and the right ought to recognize this.

The attacks against us didn't stop there. Shortly after the elections, the Red Crescent premises were burnt and destroyed by the fundamentalists with the tacit consent of the authorities. All the evidence points to this. An angry mob of fundamentalists came down from the Islamic University along Omar El Mukhtar Street in a violent and noisy demonstration. They passed in front of the Military Governor's mansion and they got to the RCS at about six p.m. As you know the Israelis are rather particular about demonstrations. Small boys are contained even before they get out of the school yard! So how could they allow this large demonstration to make its way over one-and-a-half kilometres to the RCS? Eye-witnesses say there was a police car following them with an officer in it. They just parked near the road and looked on as people broke in, burned and looted. When a fire engine came it was stoned and turned back with the police car still looking on. The Israelis later delivered the final blow to the RCS by effectively banning our cultural activities. They succeeded in destroying the spirit of the society — now our work is more or less routine medical work.

The other societies representing the doctors, lawyers and engineers have

never organised cultural activities which are open to a wider membership in the same way as the Red Crescent Society has. However, the Arab Medical Association put forward a plan in 1981 to provide free health education in schools. The scheme was rejected by the Israelis (see Chapter Three). The AMA also led a strike in 1982 which quickly spread to other sectors of the community. Dr Nabil, who was involved in organising it, is not convinced of its overall success.

It's unlikely in the present climate that any of the existing societies in Gaza could become a form of organised opposition to the occupation. It's not just a question of restrictions imposed by the authorities, although this is the most crucial factor. What's happened here, especially since Lebanon and the split in the PLO, is that there is an increasing sense of desperation. Such a situation is not necessarily a politicising one. The lack of confidence has led people to concentrate more and more on their own interests. We find we're all alone, and if we don't look after ourselves then no one else will. You can see in the elections to the professional societies that no one is standing on a political ticket. The people who are getting elected to the engineers', the doctors' and the lawyers' associations aren't individuals who are going to pursue a policy of confronting the occupation or our own political impasse. They're people from well-established families who have the influence and connections to be able to get jobs for their own members. It's a natural reaction to the political and economic reality. Not many in Gaza, especially people who have something to lose, are going to take a stand, make sacrifices, if they don't have any faith in the possibility of a victory.

This is particularly true now, after the failure of the strike three years ago. In 1982 the Israelis tried to impose VAT on services provided by all the medical professions. Of course, it is illegal in international law to impose new taxes on an occupied people. In fact, there had been a cumulative process of resentment to the increased taxes on other sectors of the population too. Not only was this tax imposed, but customs officials set about collecting it in a rough and unscrupulous way. They entered pharmacists' and doctors' offices, searched through files, breaking things and so on.

Rather spontaneously, the executive committee of the Arab Medical Association called for a general strike. All the doctors, pharmacists,

vets and dentists came out and provisions were made for emergency cases in the hospitals. Many merchants and shopkeepers joined the strike too. The Israelis responded very harshly. They welded shut the doors of many shops and ripped the shutters from others. The strike reached a critical stage. It had won considerable support and solidarity from the community in general, and there were calls to extend it. Some rather emotional speeches were made which gave some people the impression that we were about to be liberated, but unfortunately no provisions had been made to support the people who were suffering financially because of the strike. Some pharmacists, for example, had obligations to Israeli companies and they were threatened with prosecution. Without such support, the strike couldn't survive. After one month it was ended by a narrow vote in the Arab Medical Association.

The strike had a positive and negative impact: it had demonstrated the potential of civil disobedience and demonstrated the need for good far-sighted organisations. But also, its failure to achieve any of its aims may have disillusioned other union activists. The final agreement with the authorities included commitments not to prosecute those who had been on strike, but the VAT was still imposed on us.

The doctors' strike is a rare example of organised opposition, particularly since 1973. But as Abu Karim explains, this does not mean that the will or desire to oppose has been lost.

For sure it's a depressing and frustrating time for us. After seventeen years of occupation it seems we're moving further and further away from liberation. We don't have a strong local leadership, the PLO is split, and there's no organised strategy. That's the bare truth of the situation, but it doesn't mean that people have given up the struggle or are about to. The very fact that we're still all here, living half lives under tremendous pressure and striving in every way possible to stay put in Palestine, indicates the strength of our belief in the justice of our cause, the PLO and the eventual victory of our revolution. You can't see us resisting in an organised way because that option's not open to us yet. But as individuals, as families and as small groups, we're fighting every minute of every day.

There are countless examples of courageous individual acts of opposition: writers and painters, prisoners and workers, people who refuse to be intimidated and who persevere in the face of intimidation. As Abu Karim says, these individual acts represent a determination to stay put, to refuse to be intimidated into leaving. An example of this personal courage is Abu Ghassan, who sees his paintings as being part of the overall struggle.

My paintings reflect the conditions that I live in. How could I paint romantic pictures of sunsets while living here? There are ten of us in this house — three rooms, a yard and a kitchen. I find that the best time to paint is late at night when the children are asleep. They sleep in a row here and I paint in that corner. If I get really involved in a painting, I'll carry on until dawn or when the kids wake up to go to school. Then I sleep for a while before going off to teach in the afternoon shift. Where else can I paint? There are no facilities in Gaza — no art studios, no cultural centre, no subsidies or grants. The only response I get from the government is soldiers knocking on the door in the middle of the night and accusing me of being subversive because my paintings contain red, green, black and white — the colours of the Palestinian flag. All I'm doing is painting the suffering of my people. There's a painter in Jabalia who just got six months in jail because the military judge decided his paintings constituted incitement. That hasn't stopped him painting what he feels is important. It's the same for all of us. Some carry the gun, some struggle at work, and I paint. My duty is to never stop painting, never fear and never give in.

On top of these individual acts of resistance, there are spontaneous outbursts of anger which are expressed in the form of violent demonstrations. Jad was sixteen at the time of the demonstration he describes.

Jabalia is the biggest refugee camp in Palestine and whenever or wherever there is an attack on the Palestinian people, the people of Jabalia act in solidarity with them. The spring demonstrations of 1982 in Jabalia started as a result of two such attacks; the armed assault on the Aqsa mosque in Jerusalem and the dismissal by the occupation authorities of the West Bank mayors.

Early in the morning, there was real tension in the camp. Everyone

knew that something was going to happen. The people began to gather in the alleys and streets and the word went around that we were going to march on the military compound. As we got near to the barbed wire perimeter, the crowd started throwing stones. The night before, the soldiers had gone round all the streets collecting all the old tyres they could find and had piled them up in front of the compound, because they were frightened people would burn them during the demonstration. One of the demonstrators grabbed a tyre, lit it with a petrol-soaked rag and then rolled it into the rest of the pile. All the tyres caught fire and the air was filled with dense black smoke. The soldiers began firing at the demonstrators and retreated to the back of the compound. The demonstrators surged forward and we entered the compound itself. One of the young boys climbed on top of the compound building and tore down the Israeli flag. We all cheered as someone threw him a Palestinian flag to take its place. He didn't have time to raise it, because at that time troop reinforcements from Gaza arrived. The demonstrators withdrew from the compound, but after a while we attacked it again. There were even more people than the first time and the stones were falling on the compound like rain. It was so intense that the soldiers fled the centre, firing into the crowd. Many people were wounded and carried off, and one child, his name was Suheil Ghabin, died on his way to the hospital. He was only eight years old.

At midday, the Israelis brought in many more soldiers with five armoured cars. For about four hours, the camp was quiet. At about four pm Suheil's family brought him from the hospital, washed him in his house, and then four or five people took him for burial in the cemetery. They didn't take him the most direct way but round the main streets of the camp. Everyone was gathering behind the coffin and in thirty minutes, what started as a small procession turned into a huge demonstration. Palestinian flags appeared, photos of the Palestinian leaders, and at the front a big picture of the dead child. There must have been fifteen thousand people following the coffin. All the streets and alleys of the camp were full of people. The soldiers didn't move an inch. They didn't dare leave the compound, because if they had we would have killed them even if it meant the sacrifice of a hundred of our lives. That's how angry we were. The people stayed at the cemetery for about an hour listening to speeches from camp leaders and then all the people shouted, "Long live Palestine. Victory to the

PLO!"

After the burial, everyone marched on the compound again. All the soldiers were inside and they started firing from the windows into the crowd. It was continuous, that crack crack of rifle fire. Some of the soldiers tried to leave the compound and run for the armoured cars, but we pinned them down with stones so they couldn't leave the building. More soldiers, at least a hundred, came into the camp in military trucks and jeeps. It took nearly an hour for them to get the people away from the compound. They were shooting into the crowd all the time and eighty-three people were shot that day. As well as Suheil, a man died a few weeks later from gunshot wounds he received.

At about 6.30 pm, they announced that there was a curfew. Do you know how long it took them to impose that curfew? Four hours. They went to one part of the camp and forced the people into their houses and then they went to another part and did the same. Meanwhile, the people from the first part were out on the streets again.They had to send for even more soldiers so that it seemed there were more of them than us. I didn't go to my house until 10.30 and they had announced the curfew at 6 pm.

We didn't know it then, but we were in for eleven days of curfew. All night, there was the sound of shooting. After three days, we were let out for the first time, but only for two hours. The Israelis wanted us to go shopping, but we demonstrated again! The curfew was reimposed and wasn't lifted for four days, when we were released for another two hours and had another demonstration. So it went on like this for eleven days. They were trying to make us submit, but the experience of the curfew made us stronger. I used to go out every day of the curfew and visit friends in my area. One evening, I was out painting slogans on the walls of a school. Two of my friends were acting as lookouts. I looked at one of them to check everything was OK and he shouted a word at me. I leapt over the wall, sprinted across the playground and got to my house by the back alleyways. A few minutes later, my friend arrived, exhausted and puzzled. It turned out that he had shouted *esh* (what?) and I thought he'd said *jaysh* (soldiers)!

Nabila again, from Jabalia, describes the prisoners' struggle in Ramla prison against having to serve their jailers' food and wash their clothes. It demonstrates that, despite the harshness of the conditions, there is

continual resistance in the prisons.

I was released after five years in prison because, according to the doctor's report, they only gave me two months to live. They pulled me in again in 1977. The security officer said, "So you are still alive, are you?" I think they were surprised that they hadn't finished me off the first time. It was after Sadat had visited Jerusalem and they wanted me to come out in support of his visit, but I refused. How can I support a traitor to my people? They interrogated me for two months and held me for ten months. In the end, they released me because I was so ill.

It was May 1981 the next time they came for me. Many soldiers surrounded my house in the camp and burst in. It was midnight or later. I was arrested and blindfolded and taken off to Gaza jail. They put me in solitary confinement for three months, boxed up in a cell one and a half metres square. It was summer and stiflingly hot, like roasting in an oven. After fourteen days of interrogation I was brought before the court. Fifteen people took it in turns to interrogate me, firing questions at me continuously, twenty-four hours a day. One session went on for three days, but I refused to sign the statement and demanded to have my own lawyer. The trial was postponed for another month because the interrogation period wasn't over yet. They wouldn't bring me to trial because I hadn't confessed and so they couldn't convict me. Again the interrogation session was adjourned and I was transferred to join the other detained women. The trial itself lasted ten months, twelve sessions in all. The sentence was five years — two-and-a-half in jail and two-and-a-half suspended sentence. They said I had been working for an organisation which I don't support. They were trying to create suspicion, to set my organisation against me. They often use this tactic, but this time they didn't succeed.

I was put in Ramla jail and everyone knows what the conditions are like there. They tried to make us wait on our jailers — prepare their food and wash their dirty dishes. This was just too much, so we decided to go on strike as a protest. We knew it would be tough. The strike began on the 12th June 1983, I remember. Their response was to set up a trial in jail for all the prisoners, taking us one by one. On their interrogating committee was the prison governor, Riya, who was from Russia, and her deputy called Haya Shoham, originally from America. All the high-up people were Ashkenazi. Shoham was well-known for

her hatred of Palestinians, a real hardliner, a good Begin supporter, so the governor left her in charge of things. They kept on pushing us to agree to work in the kitchen, to serve our jailers. We weren't going to be their slaves, there's a limit you know, and everyone of us refused.

So then she called in the soldiers from outside and they started to search the prison, cell by cell. They confiscated our personal belongings, pieces of embroidery, clothes we had from home — precious things to us — leaving us with nothing. When the search was over, the women who were wearing jeans were told to take them off and hand them over. We only had one dress left each. We asked for more clothes, but it took them fifteen days to deal with it. One of the prisoners, Halima Efretekh, had no clothes to wear in the prison at all. She used to eat wrapped up in a blanket or wait for one of her comrades to finish and borrow her clothes. But they couldn't break us down; through it all, our spirits were high. The more they pushed us, the stronger we felt. In the search they took all the books and pamphlets, notebooks, pens, newspapers and radio sets. We were forbidden all visitors. Then the governor Shoham ordered the prisoner in charge of the library to pack up all the books. She was called Alaf Yussef — she was released in the prisoner exchange in November 1983 between the PLO and Israel. She's in Algiers now. Anyway, she refused to hand over the books and said, "Suppose you told us to demolish our own houses, do you think we'd agree?" Keeping the books in the library had become a vital matter of principle for us and there was no way we were going to budge an inch. They were our link with the outside — a touch of humanity in an inhuman place. After two hours an officer called Hanna Shaha came and demanded for a second time that Alfa pack up the books. The prisoners again refused.

At six o'clock that evening they brought in bags and started hurling the books into them roughly so that they were getting damaged. They tore some of the books from their covers. Every torn book was another attack on our little world, and they knew this. So they just carried on tearing them up, baiting us. In protest, the prisoners started to sing patriotic songs and shout slogans against Zionism. Ten minutes later a fight broke out. What I mean is the soldiers rushed at us with clubs and machine guns. There were about one hundred fully armed soldiers against us. All the Jewish prisoners were taken out and it was then that we realised we were in for some special kind of punishment. But

we kept on singing, we weren't frightened of the soldiers or their guns. Once the Jewish prisoners were out, the soldiers came into the cells and locked all the windows from inside and outside. Then they started spraying tear-gas through the grill on the door of each cell. After a while, Shoham came in wearing a gas mask and asked to talk to us. But we all shouted in unison, "No to Zionism, No to imperialism". She was furious and started threatening us, saying we'd all regret not talking to her. Then she went out and told the soldiers to attack us again. This was only thirty minutes after the first attack. This time they came with different cylinders on their backs which contained another gas. They were all wearing masks. Some came through the doors, some from the back of the cells. Some prisoners were still unconscious from the first attack. We all shouted, "Long live Palestine". I thought I was going to die. I felt that death is the same anywhere — there's no difference between dying in Beirut and dying in Ramla — it's the same struggle. I fainted and my comrades tried to lift me up on their shoulders so I could get some fresh air from the window because I was ill at the time. But they fired gas at me again and I fell on the floor. They did that to shut the women up who had been pleading with them not to fire gas at me. I got burns all over my body. The soldiers came a third time and fired gas into the room. Everyone lost consciousness again and there was no voice to be heard. We all had muscle convulsions and burns on our skin, some women had their hair burnt off. The gas burned on contact and we couldn't breathe. All the cells were filled with this gas. It gave us nervous fits. We were four women in a room three metres square. Three of the women in my cell lay in a pile in the toilet where they hoped to escape the gas. The prisoners gained consciousness in our cell and called out to reassure others that they were alright, when in reality we all still had muscle convulsions and terrible pain in our throats and eyes. The soldiers were still surrounding the block of women's cells.

All through the siege, Palestinian men were in the same prison in the block opposite and they knew that the women were being attacked. The following day, the 1st November, was their visiting day. So when their relatives came they told them everything. They could see what had happened from their cell windows. They were shouting slogans and trying to give us strength through it all. The same day a nurse was called. I don't know how she became a nurse, she should have been

working in a slaughterhouse. Her name was Hanna Samuel. She asked if any of the prisoners were still unconscious. There were four. After two days we were taken to the nurse for an examination. The effects of the gas lasted a long time with me. I had a hoarse voice and pain in the larynx and in the eyes. I suffered from general exhaustion, both in my nerves and in my joints and limbs. They refused to open the cells on the third day. The soldiers came and took prisoners from one cell into another. They took everything they found — tea, biscuits, that kind of thing — anything which contained traces of the gas.

Felicia Langer[4] came to the prison after three days and saw one of the prisoners. There were still traces of the gas in the cells and she really couldn't stand being in the cell for long. She managed to take a sample of the gas on a tissue, but I heard later that they hadn't been able to analyse it. Representatives from the Red Cross in Jerusalem came. The authorities had refused to let them visit when they first requested. Ten days later, we were visited by a delegation from the Knesset including Tawfiq Toubi.[5] The traces of the gas were still there and they felt unable to breathe even though the warders had made us scrub the cells out. They told us they found it hard to imagine that prisoners were exposed to this kind of treatment. All of us were ordered to clean out our cells again to remove the traces of the gas before any more visitors came. They wanted no evidence to remain of their crime and the jailers themselves took part in the cleaning. But there were still traces of the gas; especially in cell number 47. One of the women in there had blisters and swellings covering nearly all her body. They called in an Israeli doctor but he just said that the only cure was hot water and tea. What do you expect? We kept on demanding to see more doctors but the prison administration refused. On 30th November 1983, my sentence came to an end after two-and-a-half years, and I was released. For the other prisoners it was a victory that I had come out alive, and they tried to express their happiness by dancing *dabka*[6] from behind the doors of their cells. When the authorities came to open the door everyone started singing patriotic songs. They stopped me bidding farewell to my comrades, except through the grill in the cell doors. So I passed down the cells stopping at each, hardly able to speak. I got to cell number 47, I couldn't even say goodbye because even after a month, the smell of gas was still too strong.

Those left inside kept up the strike for about four months, and they

won their struggle. The prisoners realised all their demands — not to serve the jailers, to get back their library, to have the newspapers, and to have their visits every fifteen days instead of every two months. The victory was ours.

Imad received a long prison sentence when still in his mid teens. He tells of how prisoners managed not only to survive, but also to develop.

I was still at school when I was given an eight-year sentence. I was the only one in prison who didn't know what to do when they handed out the new razor blades.

Almost everything I know now I learned in prison. Take politics. A prison life ensured that we all got the theory and the practice! The practice came through the long hard struggle against the prison authorities. At the four prisons I was sent to, we were in continuous disputes with the governors over conditions and privileges. We had hunger strikes and dirty protests, but every time we achieved our demands we were transferred to a new prison and had to begin from the beginning again. Books were a very precious commodity in all the prisons. Usually the authorities only allowed in literature on Islam so we had to reproduce all the political books which were smuggled in from the outside. We read the books during the day and at night the prisoners near the door copied them using the light shining underneath from the corridor lamps. We used pens hidden in a special place near the door. There was a lot of pressure to finish copying or reading because there was always someone else waiting to read it. After anyone read a book they held a little seminar in which they discussed it for hours with their comrades. We read about everything — Marx, existentialism, psychology, economics. We were a very cultured bunch, especially the longer-term prisoners. Cultured as opposed to educated. Education is something you go through, while culture is something you have to strive for. You could see this difference by comparing the old prisoners with the new ones. Sometimes you got new people who came to prison and said they were Marxists and in their first meeting with you they start cursing God and religion. This isn't being a Marxist — you have to respect other people.

It was very important to retain our dignity and a sense of normality in prison. On Fridays I would collect all the used tea leaves I could

find or borrow and invite a comrade from the far end of the room to visit my corner. When he walked over I'd shake him warmly by the hand, ask him about his health and invite him to sit down. Then we'd sit politely for half an hour and chat about inconsequential things. After forty minutes or so he'd make excuses and ask to leave. Of course I'd protest, tell him that it was still early, but usually he'd return to his mattress. The next week I would visit him. There was nothing flippant about any of this. We were just preserving our traditions in an abnormal situation.

GA, a writer from Beach Camp who talked about cultural repression in Chapter Three, outlines his personal development as a writer. He started as a romantic poet but is now committed to the writing of resistance.

Personally I did not have any ambitions to be a writer at all. At most, I wanted to be well-read and to note down some of my own impressions. When I was still at school, I began to write some poems in colloquial Arabic attacking the family traditions which control the marriage procedure.

My writings developed when I was at university where I began to confront political issues. But I continued to write some love poetry dedicated to a girl I knew. But after the disaster of the '67 war, I went through all my papers and tore up all the romantic pieces. They all seemed so irrelevant, and so unsuitable for the situation which we faced. I replaced them all with one small poem and with it, I felt that I had laid to rest all my old romantic writings. Suddenly, the whole situation was bigger than my personal romantic dreams.

Basically, the literature before '67 was all about pining and weeping for a lost way of life. The disaster of '67 brought a dramatic change in the whole outlook of our literature. We had to face reality — painful though it was. It was a question of looking for new ways forward. For some this meant nationalism, for others the Soviet Union became the path to liberation. Others thought that Arab unity was the only way to recover the homeland and that Palestine could be the way of achieving unity. So the post-'67 literature is the literature of the revolution. I think that this surprised the revolutionaries themselves who were outside. We saw them as the gun-carriers and ourselves as the literary base of the same struggle. Novels, short stories and poems

became a chorus. If you put them all into one volume, you would think that they had been written by the same person: some good and some not so good. But the tone was the same: life under occupation and people's personal experiences and their own responses to the occupation. There was a great sense of personal involvement in the revolution. No story written since '67 is outside this framework. There was always a prisoner, an inflitrator, an expelled person and a fighter. We were all involved now. We are the cloak of the revolution.

We have no solely literary figures — all are immersed in politics — the literature of a cause. Thus Palestinian literature became more distinguishable in its form and more specific in its aims and role. These writers generated an energy which then incorporated other writers. Tawfiq Hajj from Khan Yunis used to be wary of political subjects but now that he addresses himself to our issues, his style has sharpened and his ability has been proved. Abdullah Tayih from Beach Camp used to write detective stories, ideas imported from abroad, and his writing only really took off when he tackled political subjects. The same is true of Zaki Aila from Jabalia and Gharib Asqelani from Beach Camp. These writers follow themes similar to those in the West Bank, Lebanon, Jordan or wherever Palestinians are found.

Every writer used symbols. For example in *The Children are Pursuing the Locusts* by a writer from Nablus, the locusts are the occupation troops who mercilessly destroy everything, leaving our land bare and without vegetation. Zaki Aila, a writer from Gaza, wrote *The Crow*, which is a traditional symbol of pessimism and death, and everything that is ugly. The crow is the occupation. Similarly, in *The Cloud which Vanished* the symbolism is that everything is changing and the future is brighter. *The Bridge* refers to the Allenby Bridge which signifies searches and humiliation for us. *The Cardboard Boxes* by Gharib Asqelani is about the Zionist settlements. An orange and an aubergine means a grenade. These symbols are not taken from Greek literature or from any holy books. They are the symbols which the people here understand from the experience of their daily lives. They are not complicated symbols like you find in the *Myth of Sisyphus* — they are simple symbols by and for the people who live under occupation. We are not writing for the critics of the Sorbonne. I write for people who work in factories and come home tired after carrying bricks all day. That's why they are easy to understand.

I worked in an Arab country until 1974. My wife left for Gaza when she was forty days from giving birth. So I decided to write the expected child forty letters. I examined the whole idea of humiliation — public and private. To me personally, it was the most important thing that I ever wrote. It was confiscated at the Jordanian border and I never saw it again. It also cost me several visits to the Jordanian security intelligence headquarters.

When I came back to Gaza, I felt the reality strongly obliged me to write. The excuses that I had made before — I was abroad, I didn't have contacts with publishers — were no longer valid. So I decided to start from scratch, to practise and learn through experience. I sent my first attempts, rather shyly, to a magazine, under a pen name, because I lacked the confidence to use my real name. I would consider myself to be a realistic writer and a socialist. I can only write about ordinary people's misery in the refugee camps because that is my experience and environment. I think the motive for writing is not to become a great author, but to give our people the chance to come to grips with their reality. My role as a writer is to submerge myself in the Palestinian cause, the reality, the people, the psychology, the sociology, in order to be able to plant the revolution in the ordinary person's heart. The writer cannot lead or start a demonstration. I want my readers to be familiar with my characters as if they were members of their own families — to live the atmosphere — to move people to question things. This doesn't make it localised writing, because if it can embody the reality of occupation, then this gives it a broader readership in the Arab world and internationally. A writer reaches international recognition through sensitive treatment of emotions, an accessibility that transcends nationalism and the mastery of a literary technique. We don't need Nobel prizes. We just need to be understood by the children of the camps.

Critics have given my works a mixed response. Most agree that it portrays warmth and it has provoked a lot of discussion which is something in itself. Some critics have tried to reduce my writings to political slogans which they certainly aren't. I'm most satisfied when a critic says I have captured the feelings and sufferings of the camps. I don't see the camp as a class or slice of society. It is a society in itself with all types of people. If I can portray the camps accurately, then this is the Palestinian problem. The camp is the owner of the

cause, the revolution, the humiliation and the inspiration. As long as I live in Gaza, I'm committed to writing about the camps, their characters and the relationships between them. That's where I feel myself. I discuss the Palestinian cause firstly as a human cause, then as a crisis. I don't use the characters like a machine — to say whatever I want them to say. I don't like to portray stereotypes either: the fighter as the giant, strong and carrying the gun: the fighter must be an ordinary person — rich or poor, successful at building friendships or not; from a happy family or not. Each fighter has a specific thinking which obliged him to carry the gun. While he carries the gun, he loves, hates, fears and hopes. He doesn't become a superman. My characters are ordinary people who have a cause to defend according to their various abilities. The Arab countries are in a period of weak culture, like a field which used to produce corn but now lacks water and careful tending. It's not my fault that they are half asleep now, despite having all the facilities. We are the opposite — no facilities or encouragement but we are strengthening, developing and building our literature as a candle to light the way for others, not that I am better than them but because my cause is always fresh and stimulating. Their problems are solvable and diverse while our problem is always the same and ever-present.

Literature in Gaza is not different from that in the West Bank. To isolate Gaza's literature would be nonsense. But we can ask if the writers of Gaza are as mature or competent as the writers elsewhere. Personally I am against making any comparisons on the basis of geographical location. All writers deal with their experience as they live it. The differences between life in Gaza and in the West Bank exist, but they don't form a different style of writing. There are differences between the writings of those inside the Green Line and those in the Occupied Territories, but they are differences in form and not in substance. The writers inside the Green Line have a different political reality. They stayed inside and live inside under Israeli law as second class citizens. We live under military occupation without any rank at all. Maybe he calls himself a Palestinian Israeli, but I can't do that. I am occupied. It's not his fault that he is an Arab Israeli. He lives within that framework. He has to be an Arab Israeli in order to resist. To work outside that framework would be suicide. But we are both writing about the sufferings of the Palestinian people — in different places. We are all asking for a Palestinian identity, a Palestinian vision.

We are both talking about Zionist occupation. We are both trying to "root" the Palestinian identity — fighting against the destructive and dissolving influence of occupation.

Samir, a young activist who was critical of the military struggle inside Gaza earlier in this chapter, believes that the way forward is to build a grassroots organisation that can channel the potential of the kind of individual courage that has been demonstrated. He recognises that this is a difficult and slow process.

I think that the situation is becoming so desperate now in Gaza that we can't afford to wait for unity outside, just as we can't expect to be delivered by waiting for revolution in the Arab world or some kind of diplomatic initiative. I'd dearly love the backing of the leadership outside, but if they can't agree among themselves we must go ahead on our own. It'll be more difficult, but I don't think we have the luxury of an option.

The strong leadership and organisation we so desperately need in Gaza to confront the occupation are not going to appear overnight. It's going to be a slow process and we have to be patient. Many of us are agreed that the first step is to develop organisations that are working at the grassroots — raising consciousness and giving people the confidence to get involved in determining their own future. We have to wean ourselves off the idea that politics is something that happens only in Jerusalem or Amman.

Until now the Palestinians have only seen the fedayeen as the basis of the struggle, and now that that is not a realistic option, we have got to find something to replace it. If you study Arafat's political career, you'll see that he's always trying to grab the headlines with dramatic actions; hijackings, visits to Cairo and Amman, without starting a popular movement at the level of the ordinary people. The revolution needs the involvement of the people — we all know this — but the struggle is always between the leaders and the Israelis, not the people and the Israelis.

Examples of the kind of grassroots organisation that Samir is advocating are slowly emerging in Gaza. Voluntary work committees and women's work committees have been established in some of the camps, aiming

to mobilise people who have not previously found a way of involving themselves in the struggle against occupation. Musa, an activist from Beach Camp, describes the work of the voluntary work committee in his camp — its successes and the problems it faces.

In 1982 some activists started thinking about establishing voluntary work committees in the camps. Our rationale was that the standard of services provided by the municipality and UNRWA to deal with the problem of the poor roads and the open sewers was pitifully inadequate. This is especially true in winter when the camp roads are awash with mud and raw sewage, creating all kinds of problems and increasing the rate of disease. Our plan was to recruit and channel some of the youths to offer their services to the people of the camps, and so on the 11th of December 1982 we founded Beach Camp Voluntary Work Committee.

The work started with cleaning roads and generally helping people who were victims of camp conditions and occupation. Things weren't easy at first. We had no material resources for our activities because it is forbidden by law to collect money. Sometimes, after we had cleaned the sand away from the roads, we'd come back five or six hours later only to find that it had all blown back. We also had to overcome the suspicion of some people in the camps. The VWC's emergence was far from a new phenomenon: a concept of helping each other in difficult times has always existed in Palestinian society, but a lot of people seemed to think that we were council workers! It was important for us to establish good relations with the community, so in 1983 I organised a series of lectures to explain to the people what our aims were, and indeed who we were. After this we felt that the VWC really began to take root in Beach Camp. This led to the idea of spreading our work through our contacts with committees in Jabalia, Bureij and other camps, so we formed the Union of Voluntary Work Committees in which the head of each committee was represented.

During 1983 our activities expanded, and now it's quite varied, depending on what we can organise at any given time. It may involve disposing of rubbish in the streets, arranging medical trips, bringing a specialist volunteer doctor to visit the camp's kindergartens or organising extra classes for students who want them. But we aren't just dustmen — street cleaning is a framework. You know, necessity

is the mother of invention. We've been living under occupation for seventeen years now — a hateful and repressive occupation which seeks to erase us as people by erasing our history, our culture and our traditions. So an integral part of our work is social. For example, we try to protect our youth from the people who bring in hashish by explaining to them its dangers. Even this has political implications as many of the dealers are collaborators and the authorities have been quick to see how they might benefit by hashish being sold in the camps. Hash dealers get six months in jail. Being convicted of membership gets you five years. The occupation authorities would like nationally-aware people to be workers in their factories, to come home with their pittance of a wage, and then to spend it on hashish. So they'll be working all day and sleeping all night, and who benefits from that? We in the VWCs try to expose these things, and such an exposure is a political act because it challenges the occupation's monopoly on thought. Many of the youths who used to lie around smoking hashish are now the people who are cleaning the streets. To me, this is a great victory against occupation, and the reactionary elements in the camps.

I believe many of our youths find themselves when they become involved in our work. They discover their giving potential, they learn about themselves and each other. And of course, when you spend a day rebuilding a house, or cleaning a street, you start to ask yourself, what is the root cause of these problems? Why is health so bad? Why are our living conditions so poor? And of course, the answer is the occupation. Once this is realised, then youths can channel their efforts against this root cause. In this way they become strugglers against occupation, which they come to see as a cancer in the body. For the body to survive, the cancer has to be cut out. No political struggle against oppression can survive unless there is a strong politically-aware base. The youths want to get hold of magazines and books, political programmes and newspapers, and this leads to discussion and exchanges of views. The *raison d'être* of the committee is constantly challenged, and we thrash out what direction we should go in. Our members want to know the root cause so they can confront it. We had the idea to start up a kindergarten, but the authorities refused to give us permission. Some people here suggested that we contact Palestinians who have good relations with the Israelis, in the hope that they might be able to use their influence to help get permission. But, right from

the beginning, we rejected this plan. We felt we owed it to our people to be straight and honest, and not get involved in any compromising deals. We could set up dozens of kindergartens with money from the Israeli Ministry of Education, but the only people who will benefit from this will be the Israelis themselves, and we certainly aren't here to do that.

After this was turned down, we turned our efforts to spreading awareness about the true nature of the Ben Porat plan[7] which aims to destroy the camps and relocate the refugees elsewhere. We are under no illusions about the political implications of this plan. We encourage people to stay put and not to be drawn into their trap. We know what the Israelis are up to. They want to increase their control over us, to destroy the camps — especially ours which is on the coast — and then to develop the area for Israeli tourism. When people move into the projects,[8] the government rents them the land for ninety-nine years. But a new military governor has the power to reduce this period to ten years, after which the tenants can be forced to pay a monthly rent to the owner of the land which is the government. Supposing a refugee can't pay the rent, the government can then give the owner compensation for the cost of building the house and then evict them, leaving the house in the hands of the authorities. So we would be back to 1948, living in tents again. And there is no chance of returning to the refugee camp. Everyone who moves out has to sign a series of documents in Hebrew which hardly anyone understands, rescinding your right to live in the camp. Then your house in the camp is razed. These laws are made to benefit the Israelis, not us. I think they are planning to complete this project in ten years, by which time the people will be paying them rent and there will be no other option left to them. It will be a *fait accompli*. The camps won't exist any more and in their place will be tourist resorts and Israeli establishments and hotels. Or it will be a closed military area. They want to break up the camps, which are so densely populated that they are difficult to patrol. The new houses are built with security in mind — easy to control. They haven't been designed with the residents' needs in mind, but as a long-term solution to Israel's problems with the camps. So, explaining these things to people is very important and an integral part of our work.

Of course the occupation has continually tried to harass the work of the voluntary committees, but it's difficult for them to come up with

the specific charges. I've been arrested a number of times and accused of being an organiser of the VWCs. I always respond with the same answer: if I have a jacket and I give it to a passer-by, is there a law preventing me from doing this? Supposing I feel full of energy and rush around with a broom. Is this illegal? Is it forbidden to do carpentry and brick-laying? I was brought before a military court once, but I contacted some lawyer friends and threatened to take the Military Governor to the High Court in Jerusalem. When he realised that I was going to put up a fight he dropped the prosecution and turned his attention to the younger members who have less experience in these matters. Even so I felt that we had won an imporant victory over the authorities by refusing to be intimidated.

Our activities have expanded this year in the fields of education and medicine and in lending labour to people whose houses were destroyed in 1983 by the authorities. In the last three months we distributed about eight hundred bundles of clothes to poor families in Beach Camp. This was important not only in itself but also because it resulted in growing support for and understanding of our work. We've also helped repair schools and distributed books to local kindergartens. Last month we sent doctors to the families whose houses had been destroyed. They were sleeping on the ground with the sky as their roof and nearly all the kids had diarrhoea. We also provided the medicine for the doctors to treat their patients.

An important part of the VWC work has been helping committees in other camps, not only in Gaza, but also in the West Bank. It was generally agreed when we all got started that the conditions in Beach Camp were about the worst and so the Jabalia VWC came and helped us with some of our activities. Sometimes we would all get together and do some work in Zaitun quarter or in Khan Yunis and we've been to Bir Zeit and Bet Aur village on the West Bank many times. So, as other VWCs helped us, we have been able to go out to strengthen and support them. We all have one common denominator — we all live under occupation. Even if the physical situation might vary, we are bound together by the spirit of volunteer work. It doesn't matter if it's in Beach, Jabalia or Bureij — I still feel that I am at home. Even if we go as far as Nazareth to participate in their workcamps, I still feel I'm working for our occupied people.

The women's work committees have similar priorities and face similar problems. Nabila describes the work of the group she is involved with in Jabalia.

The Women's Work Committees have a central organisation in Jerusalem, but most of my work is here in Gaza. All the work I do in Gaza is with the VWC here in Jabalia, which has been much more active since I was let out of prison in 1983. There are two other committees in Gaza: one in Beach Camp which was the first to start, in 1982, and one in Beit Hanun. There aren't any in the south of the Strip yet, although there are several fledgling groups, but they are not strong enough yet to form committees. For example there is a group in Rafah negotiating the opening of a kindergarten and a clinic with a doctor. Our aim is the independence of women; economic independence from men, confidence in our own ability to work and form an organised women's movement. We open kindergartens for the children and have a sewing centre — women's work here can contribute to their economic independence. We also do support work for prisoners — visits, taking books, giving publicity, offering strength to the families who are here. But what we can do is limited. We tried to set up a literacy class in Jabalia through the Red Crescent but we can't find a place for it. Gatherings of any sort, especially in people's houses, are very dangerous for us.

We have about thirty on our committee but many more supporters. Most of our members are under twenty-five and unmarried, but some are married and have children whom they bring along with them. We recruit mainly by word of mouth, but we do leaflet some schools and the WWC has a magazine. It is a grassroots Gazan movement. Women join for different reasons. I wanted to work with women as soon as I was released from prison; other women have different motivations — some have been influenced to join as a result of their work on the West Bank. But there is an atmosphere of fear in Gaza which means that people are unwilling to get involved. Some activist women have become scared and disillusioned. The whole situation here in Gaza is radically different from that on the West Bank and this affects our ability to set up committees here. The Jordanian legal framework there means committees can be set up legally. There is no comparable Egyptian law here under which committees could be set up. Twenty-

five WWCs were set up on the West Bank in 1978; they now have over three thousand members. They have been able to protect their leaders and support each other, but here, individuals are on their own; they haven't got the back-up. Also, on the West Bank the universities support and strengthen the WWCs and they benefit from the fact that East Jerusalem is under Israeli law. They have been able to open an office there for press conferences and exhibitions which is impossible in Gaza.

The level of consciousness here is still very low; we work to raise it in the camps. There are still a lot of social restrictions: women can't just go out and join a committee if they want to. They can't go and talk to one another and organise — people gossip. We have been living under reactionary laws since the Turks. There have been no attempts to change this by the authorities — they exploit it. They know how to exploit attitudes. When they want to do this they will pick any woman just to shame her. They will bring in a male interviewer and keep her under arrest overnight. They know how to turn conservative elements against the progressive; how to make people talk badly about activist women. The key to overcoming this is organisation. But there are many reactionary people who put the nationalist cause before social progress. Ours is a two-pronged struggle — against occupation and social attitudes. We must show the importance of the social cause to the nationalists and we must also work with religious women but the Muslim Sisters — they won't even talk to anyone. What sort of role can they play in social change? There is no role for this kind of organisation. But we must persuade the ordinary religious people. When I came out of prison, a couple came to visit me to show their support, but when they left, the man wouldn't even shake my hand because his wife was religious. What is this? We are supposed to be struggling together. The role for women in the revolution is for them to fight alongside men, but how does this fit in with segregationist ideas and the social attitudes towards us? We must show the links between our struggle as women and the nationalist struggle, and work to change those attitudes. It's a slow process and we must move carefully and methodically, cementing our gains and striving for new ones.

We get no support from the present leadership in our struggle as women. Many Fatah people support the negative, sexist elements in Palestinian society because it suits them. They don't want anything more than small changes. Anyone who thinks they can leave the struggle

to the outside leadership is deluding themselves.

As Gaza's economic dependence on Israel has been cemented by the Israelis, the possibility of exploiting Israel's dependence on Gaza for cheap labour and a captive market has increased. Samir again:

Twenty thousand people in Gaza work for the military government and another seventy thousand work daily in Israel. All the goods which are in our shops come from Israel: tea, coffee, rice, everything. This is our power: strikes and boycotts. Just boycotting electricity would seriously damage the Israeli economy. What we need is selective strikes and boycotts, organised from inside and supported from outside, issues that everyone can relate to — supporting the local fishermen for example. As people feel their strength, this can escalate. All this would mean a drop in the standard of living, but we could learn to live with that. To succeed, we need three things: the elimination of collaborators, strong grassroots organisation and a gradual shift away from our economic dependence on Israel. Instead of doing things which provide the pretext for increased repressing, we must learn to refuse to do things which it would be impossible for the authorities to force us to do.

Yussef, who described work conditions in Israel in Chapter Three, agrees, but points out the difficulties in organising an effective strike.

I've often thought that if all the Palestinians from the West Bank and Gaza Strip refused to work in Israel, we could bring it to its knees, but the problem is that a strike for just a week, say, will have no effect at all. It will not make the Israelis give the Palestinians their rights. What we need is a very long strike — a month at least — but the problem is that most Gazans could not live without work for a month. While I was working in Beersheba, ten of us Gazans decided to go on strike. Prices were rising all the time and the boss refused to give us a rise. We chose a good time because there was a lot of work to be done and the boss needed our labour, but we only held out for three days.

You know Israel relies on us to build their country for them cheaply and also because they have a military state, they want the army to be in a constant state of readiness. So they want us to take the place of their soldiers, and we have no choice because there is no work in Gaza.

If all the workers refused to go to work in Israel, we'd be starving within a month. Israel knows the damage that a strike could have on them and they are prepared for it. I think it was Begin who said, "we'll make the Arab workers work for 100 shekels and we'll make sure that they need to spend 150." For me it's not a problem. I could stop work tomorrow. But a father who sees his children going hungry will do anything to get them what they need.

Bassam, an economist and journalist, believes that these problems have to be overcome because there is no other viable alternative. He advocates a revolutionary strategy to exploit Israel's shaky economy, build a grassroots movement and create a nationalist spirit based on action rather than rhetoric.

We have got to start from scratch. We have to look at what we've got and exploit it. We've got labour and we've got a big internal market, so our economy has to exploit this — producing labour intensive products that can be consumed locally and that are produced on a small enough scale to avoid posing a threat to Israeli monopolies, initially at least. I'm proposing that we create a whole range of cottage industries — things that can be made in people's homes and which use our few local natural resources — fruit, vegetables, meat, pottery and dairy produce. For example, someone in Beach Camp buys two cows and with the milk produces enough cottage cheese and yoghurt to supply ten neighbouring families. Then someone in Deir El Balah pickles cucumbers in tins that normally go for rubbish — there's no shortage of them — but only on a very small scale — perhaps just enough for the family and immediate neighbours. Others could make wooden looms and work at home making rugs and clothes to be sold or exchanged locally. The possibilities are limitless of setting up small-scale enterprises that don't need expensive marketing, transport, packaging and avertising. Making marmalade is another possibility. Hundreds of little bottling plants in people's back-yards — instead of selling the poor quality oranges to an Israeli juice company for a pittance, build a small press using a car-jack to provide juice for your street. We've got to move away from this high-technology farming because it just pulls us into a race we cannot win for as long as we don't have a government to support us. Instead of setting up a battery hen farm

for fifty thousand chickens, build a coop in the house courtyard for fifty chickens, and sell the eggs to your neighbours. The whole capitalist mode of production that Israel wants to suck us into is a disaster for us. Ther power is in the hands of the few and they aren't Gazans. No profits are being ploughed back in and we just end up as victims — mass production means mass destruction for us. I'm not saying that this is going to be easy. Nor will it start tomorrow — so many things have to be changed first; the whole sense of hopelessness, the attitude of those with money who want to display their wealth — colour TVs, videos, BMWs — instead of investing it. All that has to go. I'm talking about a revolution here, a complete restructuring of how we live. The political implications are fantastic, a whole new tier of grassroots organisation. Also, the reconstruction of these things is just a resurrection of how things used to be in the villages before 1948. One step back to take many steps forward. Co-operation is to the benefit of all, but it would have to be in units so small that the Israelis would have to enter every house to destroy it. People used to survive on this basis, so why not now? We could re-establish our culture, confidence and identity on a sound economic basis so if we are annexed or if they build a hundred settlements, at least we can confront them as an economic unit, on a civil level — instead of as a mob of individual victims of Zionism. We could face Zionism with something behind us. And it's no good just sitting there saying it won't work. The alternative, to continue as we are, is a total disaster, so we simply have to make it work.

Finally, GA, the writer from Beach Camp:

Writing against occupation equals solidifying my identity: acceptance of occupation equals an erosion of my identity. While I am still watching with an aware sensitivity, then I am asserting that I am Palestinian and that I am still here. This is the feature of all our literature and all our lives, wherever we live. We are Palestinians. It is not a narrow, chauvinistic view. Because of the strength of the assault on our identity, we must resist and attract the eyes of the world to our cause. I don't want the kind of chauvinism that says I am a Palestinian and the rest of the world can go to hell as far as I am concerned. I'm saying to the world, look, I am Palestinian and I want to take part in building

a better world. But until I am seen, I am first and foremost a Palestinian.

Notes

1. *Zakat* is the third of the five pillars of Islam. It has come to mean obligatory charity and takes the form of a tax, the purpose of which is to provide for the upkeep of the community's needy members.
2. Syrian troops allowed thousands of Palestinians in Tel Al Zataar camp to be killed when it seemed that the Palestinians, in alliance with the Progressive Lebanese, had the upper hand in the civil war against rightist Christian forces.
3. Less than half of Gaza's refugees now live in the camps. Many were forcibly resettled, while others chose to leave. See interview with Musa on page . . .
4. Felicia Langer is a lawyer and member of the Israeli Communist Party Rakah. She is known for her work on behalf of Palestinian prisoners and detainees.
5. Tawfiq Toubi is a long-standing Arab member of the Knesset representing the Communist Party.
6. Dabka is the traditional Palestinian dance.
7. Mordechai Ben Porat was Minister without Portfolio in Menachem Begin's 1983 government. Ben Porat's plan has been shelved but not forgotten.
8. Israeli sponsored and controlled housing projects alongside some of the refugee camps.

'Abdel Salam was the first person in our village to build a house out of stone . . .'

So begins this collection of interviews with the Palestinians of Gaza. Doctors and big landowners, small artisans and casual labourers, Muslim fundamentalists, left-wing intellectuals, ordinary people – all reflect on their fate with surprising wisdom and insight.

Their vivid stories, told without bitterness, cover everything from the growth of a women's movement in the Strip to the role of the United Nations, from working conditions inside Israel to criticisms of the PLO leadership.

The presence of an army of occupation makes itself felt in countless ways throughout the small coastal strip mostly populated by refugees. The economy is tightly restricted, even to the sort of wooden crates into which the Gazans pack their oranges. Homes are regularly bulldozed; women and children confront the Army with tragic results.

From these short personal accounts it becomes clear why Gaza is the epitome of the Palestinian problem.

Both authors have lived in the Gaza Strip. Clive Robson is a development worker. Paul Cossali is a teacher and solidarity activist. In this book they demonstrate an extraordinary capacity to listen while the people of Gaza, so often ignored, make their views and aspirations known.

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